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MADAME RÉCAMIER.

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MADAME RÉCAMIER:

WITH

A SKETCH OF THE HISTORY OF SOCIETY IN FRANCE.

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BY

MADAME M***.

LONDON:
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1862.

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PREFACE.

THE account of Madame Récamier's life, which was the original cause of this sketch of French society, was first published in the 'National Review.' I have adhered to the original form for the following reasons:—

In 1859, ten years after Madame Récamier's death, Madame Le Normant published Recollections of her Life, accompanied by a volume of letters.

The book gave rise in England to so many mistaken judgments and false conclusions, that although, from having spoken French from my childhood, I was ill prepared for the task, yet my friendship for Madame Récamier, and eighteen years of constant intimacy with her, emboldened me to attempt to

show her character and the events of her life as they had appeared to me. Seven of the eighteen years of which I speak were spent in the *Abbaye-au-Bois*, whilst by a singular chance my family then removed into the same house, in the Rue du Bac, which M. and Madame de Chateaubriand inhabited until their death, twelve years afterwards.

But I should certainly not have laid open to the public a life so complicated and difficult to explain, if her niece had not first published the memoir above mentioned, with letters from Madame Récamier's three dearest friends, full of intimate details: and that this justification of my attempt may not be lost sight of, I have retained every allusion to the original work.

In a sequel to this sketch of Madame Récamier's life I have attempted to give some idea of the origin of French social habits. As these are entirely due to the position first given to women by Chivalry, I have entered into a few details of that institution, and of the new phase in civilization which it introduced.

Women are born more sympathizing, more dependent on the affection of others than men: having less physical strength, they have more need of help; and thus their desire to please, and to inspire kindly sentiments in all around, is a natural instinct given for self-preservation and defence. When the poetical imagination of the eleventh century added to this a power founded on faith in their perfections, they naturally impressed something of their own peculiar characteristics on the general mind. All human beings are social, but women are more so than men.

Thus their taste for analyzing sentiments, for metaphysics and poetry, became general; and their intense delight in penetrating into other minds and thoughts created conversation, which became the favourite excitement of the nation.

In a large and ruinous old castle in Styria, I saw written with a diamond on the small green oyster-shell panes of glass of one of the windows in a spacious banqueting-room, that the numerous company there assembled had never been sober, night or day, from the 13th to the 19th of March; and it was

written with exultation. This occurred at the end of the 16th century. From this species of excitement the Provençal civilization preserved one portion of Europe.

By giving power to women, Chivalry gave them honourable pride. I have attempted to explain both the strange circumstances which from the depths of humiliation raised them to dignity, and the origin of our modern ideal of love, founded on admiration and esteem. The reaction against the feudal marriage raised love into a moral sentiment, and thence established the faith that perfect purity was essential to its existence: increased decorum and politeness in all intercourse with women were the natural consequences of the increased respect felt towards them. And above all, it was on this ideal of love, which then became an article of general faith, that our modern ideal of marriage is founded.

If I have not made this clear in the following pages, I request the reader to compare *not* this, our own time and country, with the twelfth century,

but the twelfth century with its predecessors, with the days of Greece, with the state of women and society in the East—and even now with that of our Indian possessions, where it is said (and it is a matter which ought to be inquired into) that a startling proportion of the women perish in consequence of too early marriages.

But the refinement, of which the first germ was due to Chivalry, and which is now civilization, prevents our entering upon the long record of vice and misery which the history of society would unveil.

For a thousand years barbarism had counteracted Christianity; Chivalry—as M. Fauriel has expressed it—was "the first successful effort to transform its brutal violence into an organized power for the preservation of society;" and it was not until then that the Christian principle, that women were responsible beings, became by degrees a generally acknowledged truth.

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MADAME RÉCAMIER:

WITH

A Sketch of the History of Society in France.

CHAPTER I.

MADAME RÉCAMIER.

Two volumes recently appeared in Paris, entitled "Souvenirs et Correspondance tirés des Papiers de Madame Récamier," edited by Madame Le Normant, her adopted niece. To those who, like ourselves, have enjoyed Madame Récamier's conversation in her latter years, these recollections have much the same effect that a *Hortus siccus* of tropical flowers would have on a traveller just returned from seeing them in their native country.

This may be partly owing to the difficulty of giving an accurate account of events, the outlines of which are dimmed by time, and of retaining the shades and graces of language ten years after the speaker is no more; but besides this, Madame Le Normant

has, with laudable caution, avoided giving offence to any survivors whose names have been brought into contact with Madame Récamier. It follows as a matter of course that any private conversation so pruned and docked must lose much of its value. Moreover, Madame Récamier's style had a peculiarly delicate flavour; and as we have no remains of the *parler Mortemart*, which so charmed the taste of Louis XIV. and his court, so we fear Madame Récamier's *parler* will never be known to posterity.

Besides Madame Le Normant's recollections of her conversation, we have a few fragments of an autobiography in which Madame Récamier's friends are more prominent than herself: the greater part of this manuscript was burnt at her desire by her devoted friend, M. Paul David (a nephew of Monsieur Récamier). During the last four years of her life, blindness prevented her from reading it over again. She was reluctant to trust any judgment but her own for selecting what should be saved, and preferred destroying the whole: it was only due to accident that these fragments were preserved.

Perhaps the most interesting, because the most spontaneous, portions of the work are the letters addressed to her by her numerous admirers, whom by a rare alchemy she had transmuted into friends;

and we owe many thanks to Madame Le Normant for publishing them, and more particularly for the account she has given of Matthieu de Montmorency, who is certainly the pearl of the book.

There are three epochs in Madame Récamier's life. During the two first her own destiny is so influenced by public events that it is impossible to speak of her without saying a few words on the state of France. Like a fine silver thread, her career runs through the web of history, and cannot be drawn out without dragging some shreds of the coarse tissue along with it.

Thus from 1798, when Madame Récamier first appeared in public, to 1814, we see France reviving after the reign of Terror, and submitting to the yoke of Bonaparte. She was then intimate with many, both of his family and of his opponents. She was made acquainted with Bernadotte's private opinions and with Moreau's vacillations. As Napoleon's power grew, we see the general gloom, like a leaden mantle, weighing down France for twelve years, while the harmless beauty's destiny, like the spirit of the country, was crossed and darkened by his despotism.

During the second epoch (or, as we might call it, act), from 1814 to 1830, her friends were at the height of power; ministers came to her small apart-

ment at the convent, and discussed their measures there; and her attachment to M. de Chateaubriand became the motive and end of all her actions.

In 1830 another revolution overthrew her friends and their whole system. They therefore retired into private life, where they had time for society; and the Abbaye-au-Bois became a literary resort, which recalled the *salons* of ancient France. Many members of the new government mingled with the retired ministers of the last, and many republicans, literary men, and distinguished foreigners from all parts of Europe, made a point of being introduced to this last Parisian *salon*. Nor are those who frequented it for eighteen years yet reconciled to the loss of the mental cup of coffee they sipped every day from four o'clock to six in that cheerful circle.

And, as though she were identified with the destinies of France, she died in 1849, a year after the mad whim of a few men, even more vain than ambitious, had overturned what appeared the nearest approach to the reasonable liberty which the generous reformers of 1789 had sacrificed their lives to obtain; sixty years of hard-earned experience ending at last in the most complete despotism.

Returning to the beginning of Madame Récamier's career, we must make an effort to picture to our-

selves the total dislocation of all social order, or we never can conceive the strange positions into which everybody was brought during the several years which are properly called the French Revolution. Madame Récamier's adventures are among the strangest. She was born at the end of 1777; her earliest childhood therefore belongs to the *ancien régime:* her father, M. Bernard, was a notary in the town of Lyons. In 1784, however, he obtained the lucrative place of *Receveur des Finances,* through the influence of M. de Calonne, then minister of Louis XVI. Madame Bernard was a beauty, and also a skilful manager; at least we are told that she increased her fortune by well-calculated speculations. Her only child, Juliette, was left at a convent near Lyons, where she remained till she was about ten years old, when she came to Paris, and was never separated from her mother till the death of the latter. Her beauty and childish grace were already remarkable, and she became the pet of M. de la Harpe and other literary men who frequented the house: this was probably the first cause of her taste for literary society, to which, more than to her beauty, she owes her lasting celebrity. Madame Bernard, however, attached the greatest importance both to her own charms and to those of her daughter; and Madame

Récamier remembered, many years afterwards, the fatigue of the hours spent at her toilette.

Among the intimate friends of her mother was M. Jacques Récamier, of a wealthy commercial family near Lyons. He seems to have been a good-natured, jovial man, of easy morality and very courteous manners, with an aptitude for making money and spending it, combined with a fancy for quoting Virgil.

There is something so mysterious, not only in the story of Madame Récamier's marriage, but in the report universally believed when she was at the height of her fashionable celebrity, that we can only repeat them both, leaving the reader to his own conjectures.

She was married in April 1793, that is, three months after the execution of Louis XVI., at the age of fifteen. M. Récamier was a handsome man of forty-three. What was then said, and what continued to be believed by her contemporaries, was that she was M. Récamier's daughter; and Madame Le Normant's account rather confirms than contradicts the rumour. She says that she lived solely with her mother the first two years after her marriage, at which time M. Récamier hired a house at Clichy for his young wife and *mother-in-law*. In 1793,

when she was married, carts were daily dragging the nobles and best people in France to the guillotine: no priest could give sanctity to a marriage ceremony, save at the risk of his life. The Goddess of Reason and her *fêtes* in the street supplanted all Christian rites: all commerce was at a stand; *assignats* were the only currency, and fifty pounds in paper money were often given for a loaf. M. Récamier was a banker, rich for such times; and riches were a sufficient ground of accusation with the *Comité du Salut Public.*

Madame Le Normant relates that M. Récamier went every day to see the people guillotined, and that when, thirty years afterwards, she asked what could induce him to go to such a painful spectacle, he answered: "I expected each day to share the same fate, and I went that I might prepare myself for it."

In such fearful times, in daily expectation of death, when all the forms of law and religion had disappeared, it is no longer so impossible to comprehend that if Madame Récamier was his daughter, he might have thought the mere legal form of marriage the only chance of securing his fortune to her, and that his death would soon restore her to freedom; besides which, a divorce at that time was so easily obtained,

and so common, that you hear of women who had been married four or five times. It is remarkable that no mention is made of a religious marriage being performed when the churches were reopened —a practice which was general among all respectable people.

Madame Bernard's reputation had nothing to lose by this story: it was believed that the lucrative place her husband, a mere provincial notary, had obtained was due to the admiration of Calonne; and Madame Le Normant says positively that the revolution not only left her in full possession of her fortune, but that she increased it through the protection of Barrère, who was one of the worst of the Terrorists. This protection was very necessary, for M. Bernard had been a Royalist, and was probably the only *Receveur des Finances* of Louis XVI. who escaped the guillotine. She was equally useful to M. Récamier, who had long been looked upon as her intimate friend, and whose fortune would have exposed him to the same danger as her husband's opinions without some such managing friend.

If we have dwelt on this strange story, it is with the view of doing justice to Madame Récamier's character, and because it was characteristic of the times: it shows that her peculiar destiny

was forced upon her from a child. She once said in her latter days to a friend: "I was often very melancholy when I was young, for I could not properly reconcile myself to my position." She certainly never alluded to her marriage: if the story was true—and there were more who believed it than denied it—she would be the last to know it; and, if she did know it, her tenderness for her mother's memory would never permit her to speak of it. She always spoke of M. Récamier as of a kind friend totally uncongenial to her, and of M. Bernard as a father she much loved; and if we accept the story, as the public did at that time, it explains all the anomalies of her life.

For the first three or four years after this marriage Madame Récamier, shy and childish for her age, lived in complete retirement, even through the first fifteen months of the Directory.

About 1796 and 1797, when a little security was restored, a violent love of pleasure, like the high spirits of a convalescent just escaped from death, seized every one; but as yet there was scarcely a drawing-room to receive company. The finest hotels in the Faubourg St. Germain might have been hired for almost nothing; the whole Hôtel de Luyne was let for 24*l.* a year; the funds were down at five then

and long after. A few army contractors and bankers were the only people who had houses fit for the reception of company. The Tuileries gardens in the morning, subscription balls at illuminated gardens like Tivoli or Beaujon at night, where every one could go for three francs, and take a lady for one franc more, were the only places where the beauty and fashion of the new society could at first show itself.

It is probable that the keen appetite for all social enjoyment, sharpened by the long privation caused by terror, war, and famine, much increased the effect that Madame Récamier's beauty produced. The few survivors from those days can scarcely find words to express the rapture she excited in a large and mixed public. By the revolution all distinctions of rank had been not only abolished but forgotten; every one pushed on pell-mell to see the beauty; and some few remember being half crushed to death in the Tuileries by the suburban crowds *who would* have a look at her.

The churches were only just reopened and beginning to be frequented, when she was requested to hold the plate for the collection for the poor: twenty thousand francs were given; certainly much more in proportion to the state of people's fortunes then than five

times the sum now. The crowd climbed on chairs, on columns; and it was as much as the two gentlemen appointed to attend her, according to the custom, could do to prevent her from being crushed to death by public admiration. Mass and charitable collections were as new as they were welcome, as indeed was every other symptom of return to former habits. The fashionable beauties of the Republic had come out at its *fêtes*, where Madame Récamier had never been seen: during those *fêtes* the more refined and educated who had not emigrated lay concealed and terrified. This section saw with joy and hope one of the leaders of the new society come forth on the side of religion and the solemnities that had seemed lost for ever; and there can be no doubt that her inclination towards this party, whether from her own taste or other circumstances, was very favourable to the position she so soon acquired; for though fashion seems light and capricious, it often has its origin in deeper sources.

Longchamps was another of these popular resorts, where a former custom was revived. During three days of Passion-week, from the Place de la Concorde to the place where now stands the triumphal arch, the finest equipages, the best-dressed ladies, and the most fashionable young men drove, rode, and

walked: the carriages, though not very numerous, were obliged to go at a foot's-pace to allow a full view of the ladies; and Madame Récamier was universally proclaimed the most beautiful.

On the 10th of December, 1797, a *fête* was given to Bonaparte on his return from Italy, by the Directory at the Luxembourg. In the court at the farthest end was a statue of Liberty; the five directors, dressed in Roman costumes, were placed under the statue; ambassadors, ministers, public functionaries, occupied the lowest seats; the public behind them were on raised benches, arranged as in an amphitheatre; the windows were crammed with ladies, better off than the poor directors, with their bare legs and their togas, like Roman senators, on a December day. The general appeared: to a speech from Talleyrand he answered in short and clipped phrases, talking about constitutions and liberty. At this distance it sounds like a speech by a hero of some melodrama on the Boulevards, but the crowd received it with loud acclamations.

Madame Récamier was among the spectators in the court, and stood up to get a better view of him while Barras was making a loud oration; her whole figure was thus displayed, and the crowd turning that way to look at her, gave her a loud cheer of admiration.

Bonaparte turned to see what could take away the public attention from himself, and, perceiving merely a young woman in white, gave her such a harsh look that she sat down in a fright.

In 1798 M. Récamier, whose fortune rapidly increased, bought a house in the Rue du Mont Blanc (now Chaussée d'Antin), No. 7, that had belonged to M. Necker: this was the origin of Madame Récamier's friendship with Madame de Staël, who called on her to speak about it. A fragment of Madame Récamier's journal gives an account of this first interview, and of her impression of Madame de Staël. The hotel was repaired and handsomely furnished in the Greek style, the fashion of the day. As luxury had disappeared, all Paris talked of this magnificence, and great was the exaggeration: those who have seen the remnants of this furniture can testify to its simplicity, compared to the extravagance of 1859. Two years before this time M. Récamier had hired a château at Clichy, where he had established his wife and his mother-in-law, himself living at Paris, but driving every day to Clichy to dinner. The most brilliant portion of Madame Récamier's first youth was spent at this house; great balls and *fêtes* were given in the Rue du Mont Blanc, but all the intimate society went to

Clichy. It was about 1799 or 1800 that Lucien Bonaparte, assuming the name of Romeo because hers was Juliet, wrote to her very grandiloquent love-letters, the first she had ever received. She showed them to her husband, and proposed to forbid him the house; but he, good easy man, said it would be the height of imprudence to affront the brother of the First Consul; that it might injure his banking house; and commending her good conduct, he desired she would be very civil to Romeo, keeping him withal at a respectful distance: whatever he might be to her, he certainly was *not* a "suspicious husband." We may conclude from this that the talent she displayed now and long after in combining the various elements of society, the new powers and the old aristocracy who were returning from emigration, was found to be useful by extending the circle of his connections; the *noblesse* especially formed a large portion of her society.

Lucien continued for more than a year his gallantries and love-letters: at last he began to think he might be making himself ridiculous—not an unwise surmise—and requested they might be returned. She refused to give them up. We think she was fully justified in keeping them, as Lucien would fain have had the reputation of being more

successful, and by no means discouraged the rumours that were spread. Young and beautiful as she was she did not escape calumny, which she felt severely, as this was the first trouble she had ever suffered: and Madame Le Normant adds, with rather questionable taste, that she still keeps the letters as a testimony to Madame Récamier's virtuous conduct—a very useless one *now* that her whole life is before us, with the letters of Matthieu de Montmorency and many others, expressing the esteem and homage of such noble minds and distinguished characters. But these testimonials, though useless to her, are curious to us, as showing the cross breed between the Ruffian and the Lovelace, which began to flourish about 1800.

The winter following the notorious 18th Brumaire, *fêtes* and amusements increased in proportion to the growing indifference of the public to liberty and to all the great objects of the revolution. The Bonapartists had now overturned the last remnant of the republican institutions, and they encouraged with all their might the frivolity that had seized the public mind. Lucien was then Minister of the Interior; and in the highest fervour of his passion for Madame Récamier he gave a grand dinner and concert to the First Consul. M.

Récamier had no notion of her abstaining from such good opportunities of meeting these useful and powerful notabilities: she went; and this was the second and last time she ever saw Bonaparte, and the only time she ever spoke to him. The impression he made on her, unlike the first at the Luxembourg, was very favourable. She saw immediately that her charms inspired him with admiration; and it would require more philosophy than can be expected from a beauty of twenty to be an impartial judge in such circumstances. He looked at her with great softness, while whispering to Fouché; the latter came immediately behind her chair, and whispered to her: "The First Consul thinks you charming." Bonaparte's manners were natural; Lucien's were very affected: on the latter approaching to talk to her, Bonaparte said, with marked emphasis, "And I too should like to go to Clichy." At dinner he walked in first: a seat was left empty by his side, where Madame Bacciochi, his eldest sister, endeavoured to place Madame Récamier; but she seated herself further off. He seemed to have expected her to come there, looked discontented, and called out to Garat to come and sit by him. Cambacères, then Second Consul, seated himself by Madame Récamier. "Ha, ha, citizen Consul, by

the most beautiful!" said Bonaparte. After dinner he said to Madame Récamier: "Why did not you sit by me?" "I could not venture," was her answer. During the music he never ceased staring at her. This interview was not without consequences.

Madame Récamier became more and more the fashion. Her *salon* included the best and most enlightened of the nobility, who were daily returning from emigration. The Duc de Guignes, Adrien de Montmorency, Christien de Lamoignon, M. de Narbonne, Madame de Staël, some of the old republicans, and all the new society; Lucien Bonaparte, his three sisters, the Beauharnais, Fouché, Bernadotte, Massena, Moreau—all the generals of the late war, and the most distinguished of the strangers that flocked to Paris from all Europe.

It was at this time that her friendship for Matthieu de Montmorency first began—the most interesting and original feature of the book to those who love the study of rare and beautiful characters, but one which, we are sorry to say, has not been duly valued or even understood in France.

Montmorency was born in 1760; and during his earliest youth was a man of fashion and pleasure, very fascinating and ardent in everything he pursued.

When La Fayette went to America, he accompanied him, as was the fashion at that time among the young nobles. On his return, he became one of that section of the highest aristocracy who enthusiastically adopted the ideas and hopes of regenerating their country. It was on a motion of Matthieu de Montmorency, then *député* to the States General, that the Constituent Assembly decreed on the night of the 4th of August the abolition of the privileges of the nobility,—privileges which he, as a Montmorency, was more interested in retaining than any man. Madame de Staël was as enthusiastic in the same cause, and their sympathy in all these noble and generous sentiments, led to a friendship between them that lasted beyond the grave; for to his last years there is a deeper solemnity in his journals and letters when speaking of Madame de Staël than of any one else.

In 1792 he emigrated to Switzerland, and while there he learned that his brother, the Abbé de Laval, had been guillotined. He was excessively attached to this brother; the news fell on him like a thunderbolt; he almost lost his reason; he accused himself of the catastrophe: his brother had fallen a victim to the revolution that he himself had been so ardent in bringing on; remorse had the same intensity as

every other sentiment in this impassioned nature. Madame de Staël's friendship, her tender sympathy, did everything to soothe this acute suffering, but it was religion alone that brought him peace. From this time the ardent and fascinating young man became an austere and fervent Christian, and renounced every earthly passion.

He was handsome, had the most polished manners, accompanied by a benevolence slightly tinged with reserve which inspired tender reverence; naturally impetuous, it was always felt that his calm and serene manner was the effect of virtuous self-government; his charity was unbounded; the passions he had subdued had left in this ardent mind a vivacity that gave an incomparable warmth and charm to his friendships.

His affection for Madame Récamier was never quite free from anxiety; he was in perpetual fear that her delight in pleasing should be carried too far, and endanger a soul so precious. His advice, his consolations, his pious and encouraging tenderness were ever ready in every painful or dangerous circumstance of her life. He often had to support her strength in the many moments of discouragement incident to a life so brilliant but yet so empty. For we must always recollect that her destiny pre-

cluded her from the natural affections of a wife and mother; and that, lovely as she was, and ever inspiring love, it was forbidden her to feel it if she wished to preserve her peace of mind. Her pride was a safeguard, but consolation she had none; she only had the unhealthy amusement of success and the excitement of conquests.

The love of pleasing was certainly a passion with her in early youth: we shall see later that, when her heart was filled by a deeper sentiment, this passion was much subdued and modified into a habit of trying to make those around her happy.

Matthieu de Montmorency's letters are a rare monument of an affection whose purity was equal to its warmth. His mind was elevated; it might not be proportionately enlarged; but in all his judgments, his feelings, and his language there was an incomparable delicacy: the recollection of his youthful errors tempered his severity, and the austerity of the life he had imposed on himself since his conversion added to the veneration he inspired, and gave him an authority over all who approached him, to which he seemed to have a natural right.

In 1800 M. Bernard was named manager of the Post Office; in 1802 he was accused of favouring a conspiracy which might have ended in deportation to

Cayenne or worse. One of the preserved fragments of Madame Récamier's journal will give a description of this event and a picture of the times.

"My acquaintance with Bernadotte belongs to an event of my life too important, too painful ever to be forgotten; his kindness to me will ever remain deeply impressed on my mind.

"In August, 1802, my father was at the head of the Post Office; just then a very active Royalist correspondence attracted the attention of the government; pamphlets written for their cause were circulated in the south, and it was impossible to discover by what means. It was long suspected that a public functionary was in the secret: my father had never mentioned the matter, and both my mother and myself were entirely ignorant of it." Madame Bacciochi was dining with Madame Récamier at Clichy with a party purposely invited to meet her, when a letter was brought to Madame Bernard, announcing the arrest of her husband, which made her faint away.

By-the-by ladies all fainted in those days; they have given it up of late years. Her father was in the Temple; the company dispersed, but Madame Récamier saw what terrible consequences might ollow; and although Madame Bacciochi showed

more desire to get out of the way than to help, she said, half choked with the effort: "As Providence, madam, has made you a witness of our misfortune, no doubt it is that you may help us. I *must* see the First Consul to-day,—I *must*, and I trust in you to obtain the interview." Madame Bacciochi seemed very unwilling, and advised her to see Fouché, to know the exact truth, and then, if necessary, she would try. Madame Récamier asked where she should afterwards find her, and was answered that she would be in her box at the Théâtre Français. On seeing Fouché, he merely said that this was a very serious matter, but that he could do nothing; and went on to advise her: "See the First Consul this evening; to-morrow will be too late."

She left him in great trouble, and, notwithstanding Madame Bacciochi's frigid manner, went to the theatre to speak to her. There she found her with Madame Le Clerc (afterwards the Princess Borghese); they received her very coldly, but she pretended not to see it, and said she came to claim her promise. "I must speak to night to the First Consul, or my father is lost." They actually told her to remain till the tragedy was over, and Madame Le Clerc asked her if she had ever seen Lafond in

Achilles before. She retired into the darkest corner of the box, a large and deep one, and dropped on a seat; she then, for the first time, perceived in the other corner a man with very large, deep, black eyes, who looked at her with kindness and sympathy. When Madame Le Clerc asked this question, and lamented that Lafond's helmet did not become him, and was in a cruel state of anxiety because the plumes were not well fixed on, and would certainly fall off, the black-eyed stranger looked out of all patience, and said to Madame Bacciochi, "Madame Récamier seems poorly; if she will allow me to accompany her, I will take her home, and go myself to the First Consul." Madame Bacciochi, delighted to get rid of the affair, said to Madame Récamier, "Nothing could be luckier: trust to General Bernadotte; no one is better able to serve you." Accordingly they went away, and as they drove along he did what he could to raise her spirits. After taking her to her house, he went immediately to the Tuileries. Her own *salon* was full of people come to inquire the particulars, as all Paris was talking of the affair. She had not courage to face them, and waited alone till a late hour, when Bernadotte came back triumphant. He had with great difficulty obtained a promise that M. Bernard should not be tried, and he

hoped soon to get him released. Of course she was overjoyed, but could not sleep for thinking how she should get at him, for he was *au secret*, and she wanted to reassure him. She had been at the Temple before to see other political prisoners, and as she always carried a charm about her, one of the turnkeys was ready to do anything for her. Coulommier was his name, and with great mystery he took her to M. Bernard's cell. They had not been long enough together to explain anything, when Coulommier rushed in, pale and half demented, seized her by the arm, thrust her into a dark sort of hole, locked her in, and then she heard a bustle; she put her ear against the door, heard a monotonous voice, then total silence. The outer door opened and then was closed, for this recess was within the room or cell where her father was confined. Here she remained till she was half stupefied with thinking of all the horrors committed in the Temple, imagining that Coulommier had been found out, that he was carried to prison, that no one knew where she was, and that he might not tell. How long might she remain? The royal family had been in the Temple; what had they not suffered? She thought she should lose her reason, but at last she heard a sound of keys, and revived. Coulommier came and took her

out. The *Préfet de Police* had sent for her father just as she had happened to come. "A fine fright I have had; come away as fast as you can, and never ask me the like again." She had been two hours in her recess.

Bernadotte kept his word; and one morning he brought an order for her father's release, which he gallantly deposited as a homage at her feet, asking as his reward to go with her to the prison. Of course her father was dismissed from the Post Office. In the St. Helena memoirs this story is related very differently; but a letter from Bernadotte confirms Madame Récamier's account. It would be well if the whole of those memoirs were sifted and compared with contemporaries whose letters, written with all the animation of the moment, and published since, would show how completely they were dished up for posterity, as many other stories have since been for the same purpose.

In 1803 Madame de Staël was ordered not to approach within forty leagues of Paris. Madame Récamier, who saw the affliction this caused her friend, comprehended from that time the character of the Bonaparte despotism. She saw much of Bernadotte, who foresaw the future, and made her

his confidante. It was full time, he would say, to put a stop to Bonaparte's ambition; that he was not only plotting to seize the whole power, but intended to make it hereditary in his family. Bernadotte's plan was to arrange a deputation, imposing both from the names and number of its members; and that this deputation should give Bonaparte to understand that liberty had cost France dear enough for her to wish to keep it, and not to let such sacrifices all turn to the elevation of one man. All this appeared to Madame Récamier both wise and just. He showed her the list of republican generals—Moreau's name was missing; yet he was the only man whose fame as a general could compete with Bonaparte's. She was intimate with Moreau; Bernadotte and he met at her house, and had long discussions; but it was impossible to persuade him to take the lead. Soon after, in the winter of 1803, Madame Moreau gave a ball; all the strangers in Paris were there, but not one person in power; all who were French belonged to the republican opposition.

"I was struck," says Madame Récamier, "with a look of desertion. I saw that Bernadotte and his friends were preoccupied, and Moreau even more so.

Bernadotte offered me his arm to a small empty *salon*, where only the distant music and noise from the crowded rooms were heard. I told him my impressions; but he still would hope in Moreau, whose influence he thought so important. 'In his place,' he said, 'I would be this very night at the Tuileries, and dictate to Bonaparte the condition on which he should govern.' Just then Moreau passed near the door; Bernadotte called him in, and repeated all he had just said. Moreau's answer is memorable: he said that he felt the danger to liberty, but dreaded civil war; that he was ready if wanted—his friends would always find him ready; they might act, he would not stand back, but he thought this was premature; he even could not agree that he was so important a man. The conversation grew warm; Bernadotte lost his temper. 'Ah! *you* dare not take up the cause of liberty, and you say *Bonaparte* will not dare to attack it. He will laugh at liberty, and at you too; it will perish in spite of our efforts, and you will be crushed under the ruins, and not have made even an effort to save it.' I was all in a tremor. Others joined us; we returned to the ball-room, and this conversation left a deep impression on me."

And so it ought on all who read it. Here was an opportunity lost; here was an honest man too scrupulous to save his country. With similar weakness did Louis Philippe sacrifice his last chance of maintaining his position, when he refused the proposal of Marshal Bugeaud to cannonade the mob in February 1848, alleging that he could not bear to fire on the people who had elected him.

But we must pass from the deeper political interest of this ball to another anecdote which we have heard Madame Récamier relate, characteristic enough of the times. We select it as proving her accuracy, for it was related with exactly the same details by the royal interlocutor thirty years afterwards to one of his subjects who knew Madame Récamier. It is not correctly given by Madame Le Normant. About 1802, masked balls at the opera were very fashionable: ladies went in masks and dominos, gentlemen in their usual dress; and the favourite amusement was for a lady to talk so as to puzzle a gentleman as to who she could be, and how she could know so much about himself. This was called to *intriguer* him. The young Prince (now King) of Würtemberg had been presented to Madame Récamier at one of her great balls, and she had

scarcely spoken to him; but seeing him at the *bal de l'opéra*, and recollecting his appearance at her house, she began a conversation, and soon asked him what he thought of Madame Récamier. He answered that she was very handsome, but an inanimate beauty; had not a word to say for herself, and did not please him. Piqued by this, and emboldened by her mask, she commenced a very lively and fascinating conversation. The prince had no suspicion who she was, but probably the turn of her neck, her bright eyes, and graceful carriage assured him that this agreeable converser would lose nothing by being seen. He was completely captivated, and entreated her to unmask; this she refused, but gave him a ring, and told him to meet her at some ball (not a masked one) where they were both to be, and that he would know her when she claimed her ring. She did claim it, and enjoyed his confusion when he saw that the insipid beauty and the *piquante* converser were one and the same person. The prince had not brought the ring, and the letter he wrote on sending it back accords perfectly with the story related by both thirty years afterwards.

We pass over many other anecdotes tending to show the brilliancy of the life she then led, that

we may speak of Moreau's trial in 1804 from an eye-witness.

In February, Moreau, Georges Cadoudal, and Pichegru were arrested; the Duc d'Enghien was shot in March. The *fêtes* for Bonaparte's coronation were preparing while the two first were in prison waiting their trial. Pichegru had already met hi doom in his secret dungeon, where no human eye could bear witness that it was not by his own hands. Madame Récamier says: "Moreau's trial is known, I shall therefore only mention what I saw myself."

She was conducted through an immense crowd by M. Brillat Savarin to a reserved seat. The prisoners, forty-five in number, each between two *gendarmes*, were sitting opposite to the judges on raised benches.

"I felt deeply affected to see in such a position the captain whose glory and untarnished reputation had so lately been the object of general esteem and gratitude from all parties. Republicanism was now out of the question, the conspiracy was entirely confined to the royalists. Moreau was a complete stranger to it; it was the royalist party alone that stood up against the new power, and the cause of the ancient monarchy had for its chief a man of the

people, Georges Cadoudal. That intrepid Georges—as I looked at him I thought that the head so freely, so energetically devoted would fall on the scaffold, and perhaps be the only one not saved, for he offered no defence for himself; he only defended his friends. I heard his answers; they were all inspired by that ancient loyalty for which he had valiantly fought, and to which he had long devoted his life. Accordingly, when they attempted to persuade him to follow the example of the other prisoners, and ask for a pardon, 'Will you promise to give me a better cause to die for?' was his answer. He was surrounded by aristocratic names, but during this trial all names appeared insignificant beside that of Pichegru; his shade seemed to stand by the side of each prisoner, for it was known he had disappeared in his lonely dungeon. There was another recollection, the death of the Duc d'Enghien, which filled every one with mourning and horror at that time, even the partisans of the first consul. Moreau was not allowed to speak, and he was led out between two *gendarmes;* he passed close to me, thanked me for coming, and asked me to come again; but we never met afterwards." The next day Cambacères sent to entreat her not to go; for when Bonaparte read her name

in the paper, he asked what business Madame Récamier had there; and it was thought by Madame Moreau that every mark of interest shown to her husband would increase his danger. "Towards the latter part of the trial all business was suspended; the whole population was in the streets, talking of Moreau. Since then Bonaparte's name has become so predominant that no one now has an idea on what slight causes his power then depended."

It was on that occasion that M. Clavier, one of the judges, being assured that Bonaparte only wished Moreau to be condemned that he might pardon him, answered, "And who would pardon us?" He was a man of great simplicity, and had no more idea than Georges Cadoudal had that these answers would make their names last as long as the memory of Bonaparte's despotism.

The night preceding the sentence all approach to the Palace of Justice was closed up by the anxious crowds: the consternation was intense. Twenty were condemned to death, of which ten, with Georges at their head, were executed. The others, belonging to great families, were imprisoned, for Bonaparte always paid court to these; and the various ladies of the family went through the farce of obtaining this

commutation. Moreau's sentence was transportation to America. 'No one ever believed that he belonged to this conspiracy; but his military reputation was obnoxious to Bonaparte, who, while condemning these men to death for conspiring against the Republic, was himself preparing to abolish it and become emperor.

"During this trial Bernadotte was very uneasy," Madame Récamier says in her journal; "he told me he had been sent for from the Tuileries. The secret conferences he had had at Grosbois (Moreau's country-house) with Moreau kept him in continual agitation lest a word should drop that might implicate him. He promised to come and tell me how he was received. When he came he appeared very thoughtful, but much easier. 'Well?' said I.—'Well, it was not exactly what I expected; Bonaparte proposes a treaty between us. "You see," said Bonaparte, in his abrupt, peremptory manner, "that the question is settled; the nation is for me. Do you choose to go with me and France, or do you choose to retire into private life?"'

"Bernadotte did not tell me his answer, but I knew him too well to doubt one instant: he had no turn for quiet and retirement; I knew he would follow the path of ambition. He continued: 'I had no choice; I promised him no affection, but a frank

adhesion, and I shall keep my word.' I understood how their conversation had concluded when I saw Bernadotte figuring at the coronation as a marshal of the empire. But they never were friends, and Bonaparte contrived to make him feel his dislike even when granting him favours."

What we have already narrated sufficiently proves that neither Madame Récamier nor her friends saw Bonaparte assume the imperial power with satisfaction. But his sisters continued to visit her, especially Madame Murat. Napoleon was now endeavouring in every way to add splendour to his court: he felt that the beauty and fashion of Madame Récamier, courted as she was by the old nobility and the new society, ought to ornament his palace. About 1805 Fouché took to coming very often to see her. As the Minister of Police was overwhelmed with cares, Madame Récamier, who knew better than most people how much he had to do, wondered at the time he spent at Clichy. At last the truth came out. He began by exhorting her to ask for a place at court, even hinting to her that Bonaparte had never had any beautiful and good person near him who might guide and direct him. Then Madame Murat came in a coaxing way, hoping she would be her *dame du palais* as well as her friend.

On one occasion Fouché told her of another lady, young, brilliant, and considerable from her birth and relations, the Duchesse de Chevreuse, who had shown coolness towards the new empire, just founded by a hero. The emperor had soon stopped these feminine oppositions, and had made the haughty duchess remember, by one of his sharp outbreaks, the late restitution of the great property of the family of Luynes, and the possibility of a new confiscation. "Well," added Fouché, "the house of Luynes and the Montmorencies, their allies, have been too happy to make the Duchesse de Chevreuse accept the place of lady in waiting to the empress. The emperor, since the day he met you, though now some time has elapsed, has never forgotten nor lost sight of you: be prudent, and don't affront him."

Here is the hero of Marengo, here is the conqueror of Austerlitz, the subject of French admiration during fifty years, mortified that these two ladies wish to keep at home and not to go to his court! And we shall see by-and-by how his great soul was revenged. Is not his mortification a proof of the importance of women in France—an importance established by no law, and scarcely to be explained or understood except by accidental circumstances like this one? For the smallness of the great man's mind would

scarcely suffice to explain his feeling. Madame Récamier warded off these advances by praises of the emperor, not however forgetting to add that she could not separate herself from her friends.

Fouché arrived one day with a face full of sunshine. "Well, now you will have no more excuses, for the emperor has sent me expressly to offer you the place of lady in waiting." It seemed to him so natural that she should accept it, that he did not wait for her answer, and went to talk to some one else. It was now full time to decide. She repeated all the various conversations that had passed, and which I have greatly abridged, to M. Récamier, adding that her repugnance was invincible. M. Récamier left her the entire mistress of her decision. When Fouché came next she qualified her refusal with many flattering speeches, but declined the honour. He flew into a passion, abused all her friends, especially Matthieu de Montmorency, broke out against the *caste nobiliaire*, for whom he said the emperor had a fatal predilection, and, turning on his heel, he never again entered the house. Madame Récamier now hoped this matter was settled.

She enjoyed her social success. The few eye-witnesses who survive still remember the circle that used to collect round her when she danced; for the

luxury and riches of Bonaparte's court, and the wealth he had brought back from the countries he had invaded, made Paris a very different place from what it was five or six years before, and ladies had now *salons* to show themselves in.

Madame Le Normant has been criticised by the few remaining contemporaries of Madame Récamier for saying she was unconscious of the effect she produced. Those who enjoyed her intimacy during the latter period of her life remember how amusing she was in recounting these scenes of her youth, and how little she affected to have been indifferent to the admiration by which she was surrounded. There are still some who remember the sensation when Madame Récamier came in; and though drawing-rooms in those days were not so crowded as they now are, all rushed to see her, and it was difficult to approach. She was celebrated for the shawl dance, and the description of it in 'Corinne' is taken from her: it was invented by Lady Hamilton on seeing the drawings of Pompeii and Herculaneum. At a period when everything was Greek it could not fail of success.

Madame Récamier seemed now at the height of her prosperity, and many letters prove that she was ready to share it with others; and Matthieu de Mont-

morency's anxiety to prevent her from being absorbed by the world, no doubt cherished these good feelings. Though a shade of melancholy occasionally came over her, she herself said that her life had been up to this point peculiarly fortunate; prosperity had not weakened her character, as she was soon called upon to show.

One Saturday in the autumn of 1806, M. Récamier rushed in, his face so altered she scarcely knew him. He told her that on account of the financial state of Spain his bank was in danger of stopping payment, unless the Bank of France would lend him about a million of francs, for which he had offered the best security; but if this was not obtained he was a bankrupt; that she must do the honours next day at their usual weekly dinner-party, in order that nothing might be suspected, but that he could not bear to be present, and would go out of town till he should get the answer on Monday. Collecting herself, she endeavoured to raise his courage, but in vain. He went away, and she afterwards described herself to have felt during the dinner-party as if all danced before her; but she was perfectly herself, and no one perceived any sign of her inward agitation. The loan of the million francs (about 40,000*l.* sterling), not at all an extraordinary request

at a time when government was doing everything to re-establish public credit, was instantly and harshly refused.

Madame Récamier could not help knowing that by declining to be a lady in waiting she had brought on the denial of her husband's request, and she bore the consequences without complaining. She had been the child of prosperity: not only was she brought up without being taught the first elements of economy and household management, but she had never been permitted to learn anything on the subject.

The sensation caused by this catastrophe was immense; many smaller houses were ruined in consequence of the failure. M. Récamier gave up everything, and his creditors proved their esteem by placing him at the head of the liquidators. She immediately disposed of her jewels; the plate was sold, the fine hotel was advertised for sale. Until so valuable a property could find a purchaser, she took up her abode in a small apartment on one side of the garden, and the large suite of rooms was immediately let ready furnished. It is but justice to the good feelings of society to say that the respect this behaviour inspired increased the crowd of friends who literally besieged the house to express their sym-

pathy. Madame de Staël writes from her place of exile with that impassioned friendship which had such charms for those who were happy enough to be the objects of it, entreating Madame Récamier to come to her. Junot, the Duke of Abrantes, although a favourite of Bonaparte, professed great admiration and friendship for Madame Récamier. He happened to come to Paris about this time, and witnessed her reverse, and the respect her behaviour inspired. When he shortly afterwards joined the emperor, and, still under the impression of his feelings, could not help speaking of it, Napoleon, interrupting him with ill humour, exclaimed: "They would not pay so much respect to the widow of a field marshal of France killed in battle!"—a speech invaluably characteristic.

Three months after the bankruptcy, Madame Bernard died of a long and painful illness, which she had borne till this downfall with a strange mixture of fortitude and frivolity; every day, most becomingly dressed, and lying on a sofa, she received company for a few hours. She had never been separated from her daughter since the marriage of the latter, and Madame Le Normant says M. Récamier's ruin caused her death.

Madame Récamier spent the ensuing months in

extreme privacy. Her health suffering from these disasters, she was at length persuaded by Madame de Staël to pay her a visit at Coppet, where a romantic adventure awaited her. This was in the summer of 1807. Prince Augustus of Prussia, nephew to Frederick the Great, had been taken prisoner in 1805, and was now on parole at Geneva. His youth, the recent loss of his brother, killed in battle by his side, the misfortunes of his country and his family, would alone have made him interesting in Madame de Staël's eyes: added to this, he was very handsome and chivalrous, ardent in his feelings, with that mixture of frankness, innocence, and sentiment peculiar to the young Germans of that epoch. He fell passionately in love with Madame Récamier. He was a Protestant. In Prussia divorce was authorized both by the ecclesiastical and the civil law, and in the beginning of the century custom had made it so general in Germany, from grounds of complaint quite independent of moral conduct, that no obloquy was attached to it. There was nothing very extraordinary, therefore, in his venturing to hope that Madame Récamier would obtain a divorce and might consent to accept his hand, as Madame de Staël had probably told him the strange story that was current. Her imagination, always favourable to the im-

passioned and the romantic, pleaded eloquently for him; and in the beautiful country round Geneva the very air was full of romance. The associations of the place with Rousseau, the society of Coppet and of Madame Récamier's hostess, were invested with an ideal halo, in marked contrast with the vain and dissipated world by which, with the exception of one friend, she had been exclusively surrounded in Paris. From an atmosphere such as this she wrote to M. Récamier to ask for a divorce. In a fever of impatience the prince awaited the answer. It came: the husband did not refuse; he admitted she had a right to obtain her freedom, but he appealed to all the generous sentiments of her heart, he recalled the affection he had shown to her from childhood, ending by a request that if the separation did take place it should not only be out of Paris, but out of France; and he said that he would meet her at any spot she might choose to appoint in order to follow up the necessary measures to complete it. The letter was dignified, paternal, and tender. She was struck dumb: she saw the protector of her youth, whose indulgence had never failed her, growing old, despoiled of the large fortune which he had delighted in seeing her enjoy, and to leave him in his misfortunes now appeared impossible.

Her biographer adds that she returned to Paris in the autumn, giving the prince no decided answer; and peace (a disastrous peace for Prussia) having been concluded, he was soon able to return to Berlin, where he employed himself in trying to obtain the consent of his family to this marriage. Madame Le Normant then gives letters from the prince, written at long intervals; and the whole narrative leaves such an unfavourable impression of Madame Récamier, that it has given a false idea of her whole character, which idea the English reviewers have taken up and repeated; and it is also evident from an article written by M. Guizot on her life that he too has received this impression. One letter, in particular, seems to prove great heartlessness on her part. It was written by the prince in 1811, and in it he entreated her to meet him at Schaffhausen, where he came three hundred leagues to see her: she neither came nor wrote. Madame Récamier was too fond of pleasing, and was not blameless; but this is such cruel trifling, and so unlike herself, that we cannot accept the inference without searching a little deeper into the matter.

In the year 1846 there came to Paris two German ladies; the eldest was thirty-eight, the other considerably younger: they were called Countesses of

Waldenburg. Madame Récamier received them most tenderly, as the daughters of a valued friend who had died in 1845. The eldest must have been born in 1808, and they were the daughters of Prince Augustus, some said by a left-handed marriage; but however that might be, he had owned them as his daughters: all Berlin visited them, and they had presided at his house for years. Nevertheless we have no doubt that his passion for Madame Récamier was genuine, and that the three months at Coppet were, as Madame Le Normant expresses it, spent in the enchantments of a passion which touched her, though she did not entirely return it. We may presume that M. Récamier's letter recalled other feelings. We have no doubt that she was ever the idol of Prince Augustus's imagination; but as we can testify to the existence of the ladies in question, we cannot look upon Madame Récamier as the hard-hearted coquette she must have been if the prince had been a single-hearted and faithful lover, a sort of Amadis de Gaul, as he is represented. Madame Le Normant knew these ladies well. *We* prefer sacrificing a little of the prince's character as a hero of romance, in order to clear Madame Récamier, as justice requires. In speaking of him she once said he was passionately in love, but

that he was very gallant, and had many other fancies.

Much more might be said on the *dramatis personæ* of this singular story, of which we have been particular to relate the facts and dates, as more certainly known than the sentiments at this distance of time. M. Récamier's consenting to the divorce, yet preventing it by appealing to her feelings, appears very selfish. Whatever might be the truth of the original story, he knew that she had been married to him as a child; that her conduct was unimpeachable; that her position was a false one; that she had many years still before her; and that he had now an opportunity of releasing her from a chain that had been fastened on her with as little responsibility on her part as if she had been an infant in arms. It is remarkable that he should have made it a condition of his consent that the divorce should take place out of France. It looks as if he had always regarded her as a useful and showy ornament to his household; and did not like to publish his loss, but could bear it very well if no one knew it.

Madame Récamier spent much of the following year at Coppet, where Madame de Staël remained two whole years, writing her work on Germany, in which she so carefully abstained from politics, that

she hoped it might be the means of obtaining a recall from exile. From this illusion she was roused by a sentence of complete banishment from France, an order that she should confine herself within four leagues of Coppet, and that the 10,000 copies of her work should be destroyed. This work did not contain a single line against Napoleon, but it praised the Germans. It has been seen that Madame Récamier did not write or meddle with politics; she only refused to belong to the party of the oppressor; yet she was now to suffer from the same awful despotism which every year enlarged its circle, and was as minute as it was gigantic.

Bernadotte was in 1810 adopted by the King of Sweden as heir to the throne. Madame de Staël's husband had been one of the highest Swedish nobles: her children therefore might there claim a home from which their mother was not an exile, and where she would be doubly welcome to the future king from her French birth and her great talents. She decided to escape to Sweden, and Madame Récamier was determined to see her once more before her departure, as it might prove a final one. Not to awaken the vigilance of the police, Madame Récamier had given out that she was going to Savoy for her health: many of her friends warned her against this step, which they

called an excess of friendship. She set out for Coppet on the 23rd of August, 1811; Matthieu de Montmorency had preceded her. An eloquent passage in Madame de Staël's 'Dix Ans d'Exil' describes her feelings, when, the day after his arrival, he received at her house the sentence of his exile—sent thither to show that she was the cause of it. She then relates that, during this paroxysm of indignation and grief, she received a letter from Madame Récamier, announcing her visit to Coppet for a few days, on her way to Aix. Madame de Staël, with all the ardour of her character, wrote, entreating her not to come; but to drive past her windows and not to see her seemed impossible. She remained one day and night. It was enough: the plague was not more infectious than contact with an enemy of Bonaparte. Sentence of exile was immediately passed. M. Récamier joined her at Dijon, and there only she learnt that she was banished forty leagues from Paris. She decided on going to Châlons, where she knew the *préfet*, taking with her M. Récamier's niece, then a child, whom she had thought of adopting some years before. Châlons was near Montmirail, the château of the Duc de Doudeauville, whose great friendship for her, and alliance with Matthieu de Montmorency, and the consequent visits of the latter,

made her hope to feel less lonely in so small a country town. Yet she seldom saw them, so fearful was she that they might suffer for their kindness to an exile. One of the letters which she received at this period is curiously significant of the times: it warns her against her project of travelling, lest she should meet accidentally at an inn any of her friends who were obnoxious to the emperor. He would be sure to know it; and complete exile, or perhaps imprisonment for life, might be the consequence. The other letters received by her are all in the same spirit of caution, though less explicit.

During the whole time of her exile, Madame Récamier adopted the retired and quiet habits of life that her youth and lonely position required; but as she was resolved never to solicit a recall, she refused to stoop to any of the prudent calculations recommended by her friends. She had particularly requested Junot, who was a favourite of the emperor's, never to pronounce her name before him. This honourable pride in a young and beautiful woman, brought up in the very lap of vanity and worldliness, would alone show that a woman can have the sentiment of political dignity, even though she never writes on a political subject, and is not pledged to any opinion. Châlons was very monoto-

nous, and, considering her former life, must have been difficult to bear; but instead of fretting after Paris, she turned to account the resources the country town presented. She made a friend of the organist, and obtained leave to play during high mass, and to practise at times: her love and talent for music were a great solace to her.

After eight months spent at Châlons, Madame de Staël, who had not yet left Coppet, entreated her to come to Lyons. She did so, and there found a companion in the unfortunate Duchesse de Chevreuse (already mentioned), also exiled by Bonaparte. Madame Récamier, seeing how ill she was, endeavoured to persuade her to go to Italy with her, and thus to make the best of adverse circumstances by travelling for her health; but all her reasoning was thrown away, and she says of the duchesse, "mais elle n'était point raisonnable." Madame Récamier was herself eminently so.

We will give an anecdote of her exile, as an illustration of the effects of the petty despotism of that time, which she loved to relate to those who were too young to have seen it. She had been but a few days in Lyons when a M. G., who had visited her in Paris in the days of her splendour, hearing of her arrival, hastened to pay his homage to the fashion-

able beauty. He was preparing a *fête champêtre* at his house, a few miles from Lyons, and entreated her to grace it with her presence. She had avoided large assemblies since her reverses, and declined, saying she had come only to visit Madame Delphin, her sister-in-law, and pleaded that visits from M. Ballanche and the Duc d'Harcourt would detain her at home. Objections were useless—she must bring them all; and, tired of refusing, she agreed. They all went; but M. G. just nodded to them, and did not even ask them to sit down. Astonished at this, they looked at each other, and immediately went away, laughing at the oddity of the adventure. A few days afterwards M. G. met her at a dinner-party, and happening to sit by her, said with great simplicity, "What could I do? I learnt that you were exiled. I hope you are not offended." Madame Récamier was so amused at this unconscious meanness that she said, laughingly, "Sir, it is impossible to be offended with such a person as you are." This he took for a compliment, and declared she had the most charming temper.

Madame Récamier set out for Italy with her maid and her little niece, afterwards Madame Le Normant, in the beginning of 1813. She had no longer a large fortune, and travelled with a *vetturino*. To make the

journey less irksome they carried a little library with them, selected by M. Ballanche, who at this period became an important element in her life. This devoted friend had been presented to her at Lyons; he was the son of a printer, and the friend of Camille Jordan (afterwards a celebrated orator of the Chamber), who, anxious to secure her goodwill for him, told her his history, which was one of disappointment. His face had been disfigured by an operation, but it was by no means ugly; his eyes were bright, large, and intelligent; the lower part of his face was swollen on one side as if from toothache; his appearance was simple, perhaps a little uncouth, but the most remarkable benevolence in countenance, voice and manner gave an impression thoroughly pleasant to all who had any discrimination. The history of his generosity and self-devotion told to Madame Récamier, who was ever open to admiration for all noble sentiments, made her take to him with the ready kindness of her nature, and he expanded like a drooping plant in the sunshine of her presence. From that moment he was her property: he never asked, never thought of a return for his intense devotion; the pleasure of looking and listening was enough. Those who can recall their first evening at Madame Récamier's in the days of the

Abbaye-au-Bois after 1830,—those who remember how, awed by the reputation of its *habitués*, they shrank timidly into a corner, and how his kind and benevolent look reassured them, cannot understand that any one should call him ugly. His speech was slow; all his ideas refined, pure, and noble; his taste exquisite. He was ignorant of all foreign literature except the Italian poets and the philosopher Vico; but his acquaintance with all the delicacy and refinements of French literature was complete, and his style of conversation had the flavour given by the contemplation of the beautiful and perfect in art. His letters give a faithful picture of his singular nature, and, with those of Matthieu de Montmorency, form the most original feature in the book: we may presently quote a few; but they are valuable as a whole, more as showing the fine nature of the writers than as giving any remarkable anecdotes or events. One of M. Ballanche's friends always spoke of Madame Récamier as his Beatrice, since in his worship for her he recalled Dante's love for the divine Beatrice: there must have been a similar spark of celestial love in these two minds. Such was M. Ballanche, of whom we shall have occasion to speak again.

Madame Récamier and her party arrived at Rome

in Passion-week. We must not imagine the Rome of 1812 to have been what it was twenty and thirty years later: Rome had then no Pope, no cardinals; it was not the capital of Catholicism, it was the *chef-lieu du département du Tibre.* The French troops then, as now, were masters of Rome. The ceremonies Passion-week were not performed in the Sistine chapel, but in the chapel of the Chapter of St. Peter; the Pope was a prisoner at Fontainebleau; and a mournful spirit seemed to hover over the whole city. The aversion to the French dominion was intense in all ranks: the only house where any company assembled, was that of a great banker. Madame Récamier took an apartment in the Corso, which soon became the *rendez-vous* of the few French and other strangers then at Rome; which was no longer the resort of the curious and cultivated from all parts of Europe. Soon after this M. Ballanche came all the way from Lyons to spend one week with Madame Récamier, who, wishing to show Rome to him, took him the very evening of his arrival to the Coliseum. The party filled three carriages, and went to see it by moonlight. Some one noticing that he was bareheaded, entreated him, with the usual horror of the Romans for the night air, to put on his hat; but he had

forgotten it at Alexandria, in his haste to come to Rome, and had never thought of buying another. He was obliged to return after one week's stay; and his affliction at leaving Madame Récamier alone in Italy made him characterize it as the most melancholy place on earth. But she thought otherwise, and ever remembered this journey as a poetical chapter in her life. The political feeling of Italy was congenial to her, for the people hated Bonaparte. She was doubtful, in case she should go to Naples, how Madame Murat might welcome her; but on receipt of a most cordial message from both king and queen, she set off, and was surprised by finding relays of horses at every stage, provided apparently for her. This was in December, 1813—the eventful winter of Bonaparte's downfall. Fouché was just then going to Naples on a mission to Murat. He had not seen Madame Récamier since the day when she refused to belong to his master's court; he now met her at an inn at Terracina. He entered the hotel in a towering fury: "Where is the impudent rascal who has taken my horses?" Recognizing his voice, she came out of her room: "I am that rascal, Monsieur le Duc." He was astounded; and pretending not to see his embarrassment, she inquired the object of his hurried journey. King Joachim (Murat)

had just then been summoned by England to join the coalition; and as Fouché went to prevent this, no time was to be lost. He asked her, rather abruptly, what business she had at Naples; and added some unasked advice, terminating by, "Yes, madame, recollect the weak should be meek;" to which she answered, "Yes, and the strong should be just." Thus ended the conference, which contrasted strangely with their last meeting.

Immediately on her arrival at Naples, a page came from the queen to the apartment taken for her, with an elegant basket of fruit and flowers. The next day, when she went to thank her, she was received by both king and queen more like an ambassadress than an exile.

And now the catastrophe of 1814 came like a torrent of icebergs, crushing to pieces all the show kingdoms which had been got up, painted, and gilt during the last twelve years. Poor Murat was in a quandary; his satin doublet, his hat and feathers, did not cover a heart and head fit for such times. Austria and England were egging him on to join the coalition. He had written to his brother-in-law imploring him to make peace; but Napoleon always treated his kings very cavalierly, and this time he did not even vouchsafe an answer.

Meantime the allies threatened ruin to himself and his people: he was told that his duty as a king superseded his duty as a subject; and it was during the inward conflict consequent on this dilemma that Madame Récamier arrived at Naples. Madame Murat confided the state of her husband's mind to her. Public opinion called loudly for King Joachim to declare his independence of France; the nation clamoured for peace at any price; the allies exacted an immediate answer. Murat signed on the 11th of January, 1814, the treaty with the coalition, and when it was just about to be publicly proclaimed, he rushed into his wife's *salon*, where he found Madame Récamier; and, perhaps hoping she would advise him to do what was already done, he asked her opinion. "You are French, sire; it is to France you should be faithful." Murat turned pale, ran to the window, opened it violently, crying out, "Am I then a traitor?" and he pointed to the whole English fleet sailing majestically into the bay. He threw himself on a sofa and burst into tears. What a picture!

The sacrifice of whole nations to the maintenance of a despot has ever been the fashionable patriotism of the French in the nineteenth century. Murat might have left the kingdom to the natural politics of its position, joined Bonaparte and fought by his side;

but this third course never seems to have occurred to any of the party. However, as all Bonaparte's generals at that time did what they could in the *sauve-qui-peut* line, we may charitably suppose that they had all found out that their master thought of no one but himself, and that they had a right to do the same. The queen, much firmer, though probably not less agitated, got him a glass of orange-flower water, and endeavoured to calm him. They then drove all over the town, were enthusiastically received, and appeared at night at the theatre with the Austrian ambassador and English admiral. Murat soon left Naples for the army, leaving his wife Regent.

The overthrow of Napoleon delivered the pope, Pius VII., from his thraldom, and Madame Récamier counted as one of the most solemn moments of her life that in which she witnessed his return to Rome. All the young nobles and gentry went to meet him, took out the horses, and dragged the state carriage to St. Peter's. The rapture of the whole town was not to be described. When the old man, whom they had scarcely ever hoped to see again, knelt before the altar, and the *Te Deum* resounded through those high vaulted arches, tears flowed from all eyes.

Madame Récamier had now passed the romantic period of her life, and was entering on a new phase. She had been rich and the fashion; she had been ruined and banished; she had been surrounded by lovers, and yet had escaped from the troubles of passion, though her imagination may have been at times somewhat captivated. This seems to have been looked upon as a personal affront by all those who have reviewed the book; yet they might have seen many men who at thirty-five had never found the woman who entirely satisfied their imaginations, and they might have recollected that many human beings, male and female, never *do* meet with this ideal. Not a few have even had Hobson's choice (poor fellow!); her case, however, was just the reverse. *She* was not starving for affection, nor lonely. Want did not make her snatch at anything she could get. She had besides a very romantic imagination, a very proud nature, and did not like to lower her pretensions; and, moreover, discontented critics might recollect that her peculiar pride, her delicate taste, and her good sense were all enlisted on the same side. Again, her education had been specially directed to the love of pleasing: her husband had made her talent for charming all beholders a useful element in his business; and no wonder if this, joined to the natural gaiety of her

nature, had given her great delight in making conquests. But it was a good-natured, laughing, playful delight: she did not wish to give pain; she only wished to give pleasure; and she had the same feeling towards man, woman, and child. If a child appeared she would give it sugar-plums, without inquiring too curiously how far they might spoil its teeth. She was instinctively kind and courteous to inferiors and servants; she would talk pleasantly to a dog, and stroke it that it might wag its tail. She treated her admirers much in the same way; and this universal kindliness no doubt helped to preserve her from any one absorbing sentiment. As long as she lived she had much of this in her character; but in youth it was naturally the most predominant feature.

When she came back to Paris she was radiant with delight, and seemed handsomer than ever: solitude and reflection had given her fresh sources of enjoyment; her taste for intellectual society was greatly increased, and she told her friend, Madame de Boigne, that she would give up henceforth the fashionable and dissipated crowds she had so much frequented in her early youth, and confine herself to the refined and the cultivated. This had become much easier under the Restoration, for society had

returned into its old channel. No woman of character would now be followed by crowds in public gardens as in 1798. *Salons* had never attained the development natural to them under Bonaparte, but had been blighted by the terror of his all-prying eye, and the vulgarity of the ladies of his court. Now, however, allowing for the difference of manners, they attained almost as much brilliancy as before the Revolution.

M. Récamier's business was less extended than in the beginning of the century, but he was again a prosperous banker. His wife too had inherited her mother's private fortune, about 16,000*l.*, which had maintained her in exile. She therefore returned to many of her former habits, though never to the great splendour of her youth. All her old friends had returned; Matthieu de Montmorency was appointed *chevalier d'honneur* to the Duchesse d'Angoulême, and was looked upon as one of the chiefs of the ultra-Royalist party. The year 1815 opened joyfully for the Royalists; they had now the lead in everything. Madame Récamier's persecution under Bonaparte, and the great influence of her oldest friends, placed her in a really higher position, though perhaps a less conspicuous one, than either her beauty or her wealth had given her before. This party was thinking of

reorganizing France according to its own ancient model, when the news of Bonaparte's landing came like a thunder-clap. All Madame Récamier's friends filled with terror, fled in every direction, and did what they could to persuade her to follow their example; but she would not leave Paris. If the consternation of the Royalists was now great, the nation itself had little reason to rejoice. The peasantry and the lower classes had been worked upon by the Bonapartists to believe the Royalists were on the point of re-establishing all the old feudal privileges which had been abolished under Louis XVI.; but these peasants were also mourning for the death of five hundred thousand of their sons, and therefore, with the exception of the remnant of the soldiers, they disliked Bonaparte. The commercial part of the community, comparatively small, had a decided aversion to the Imperial *régime*. The nation therefore, discontented with the present, smarting from the past, and mistrustful of the future, stood aghast waiting the issue; for the army alone, it must be remembered, joined Bonaparte.

Murat, on hearing of Napoleon's success, turned with his army against the Austrians, was put to flight, and landed in the south of France, where Bonaparte had him imprisoned. After the battle

of Waterloo he was released, and after various adventures landed near Naples. He hoped that his former popularity, real or fancied, would set him again on the throne; but it was in possession of the Bourbons, and he was taken and shot, according to law. He died courageously. He had always been a valiant soldier, delighting in fine clothes and spirited galloping horses. He loved to bend on one knee at a lady's feet, to put his hand on his heart, to talk of being a *chevalier Français*, and of love and glory. He always had superb feathers in his hat. Such was Madame Récamier's description of him. Poor Murat! His wife, who had been left Regent, deserved the gratitude of the Neapolitans for her conduct. For when the Austrians were approaching the town, after her husband's defeat, the palace was lighted up by her orders, that the mob might suppose all was going on as usual. Knowing they would arrive in the morning, she remained till a late hour of the night, that the town might not be a scene of pillage and anarchy, as it certainly must have become in the absence of a governing power.

Paris had a second time the mortification of seeing strange uniforms in every street; and the Royalist party, who profited by their success, hated them almost more than they hated the Bonapartist

uniforms. We observe that the fragment of Madame Récamier's own writing in relation to the Duke of Wellington, merely says that she saw him on his return from Waterloo, and that the visit was painful to her; but Madame Le Normant attributes a boastful speech to him, so totally opposite to his character, that we may fairly decline to receive it.

In the beginning of 1817, M. Ballanche, having lost his father, sold his printing establishment, and came to live at Paris, that he might see Madame Récamier every day. In July of the same year, Madame de Staël died: this was a terrible affliction both to Madame Récamier and to Matthieu de Montmorency. It was during Madame de Staël's last illness, and very shortly before her death, that Madame Récamier and M. de Chateaubriand met for the first time; though it was not till the following year that he became a constant visitor at her house.

We have seen how her admiration for genius had first drawn Madame Récamier to Madame de Staël, and how devoted was the friendship that made one so prudent in general risk everything for its sake. This enthusiasm for talent and noble conduct was certainly the strongest feeling in her nature. M. de Chateaubriand had at that time the highest literary reputation in France; he too had resisted Bonaparte in

the height of his power; he seemed the natural heir to Madame de Staël's place in her heart. To these recommendations were added a fine countenance and noble and polished manners. It might be expected that her imagination would be entirely captivated; and so it was. Her most devoted, most generous friends, Matthieu de Montmorency and M. Ballanche, soon perceived that they now occupied only a secondary place in her heart. From the letters of these incomparable friends, it is evident that she could not, neither does she seem to have wished, to conceal from them that M. de Chateaubriand had taken the place so many had wished to occupy; and when, thirty years afterwards, she spoke of this overwhelming sentiment to a friend, she said, "It is impossible for a head to be more completely turned than mine was by M. de Chateaubriand: I used to cry all day." Matthieu de Montmorency, in a letter written about this time, says, "I was hurt, I was ashamed, to see the sudden change in your behaviour. . . . . I opened with profound emotion your note, which is better than your incredible silence—that sudden coldness which I know not how to characterize or to explain. I don't think it was a bad feeling which made me dread asking for an explanation." And he says, farther on: "I was

overwhelmed with trouble and confusion, both in my own eyes and those of others, at the sudden change in your manner. Ah, madame, what rapid progress in a few weeks must this evil have made thus to estrange you from your best friends! Does not this thought make you shudder? Ah, turn — it is yet time — turn to Him who gives strength when the wish to obtain it is sincere—to Him who alone can cure all ills. God and a valiant heart combined may do anything. I pray from the depths of my soul, and with all the strength which the ardour of my wishes gives me, that you may be upheld and enlightened; that you may be preserved by his powerful aid from weaving with your own hands a chain of wretchedness which will make those who love you even more wretched than yourself."

If we read this in a work of fiction, we should say such friendship was imaginary. Happily there is no denying it. Both Matthieu de Montmorency and M. Ballanche dreaded for Madame Récamier's peaceful life "the contact of one so capricious, so fitful; they dreaded the uncertainties of a temper to which the greatest success had failed to give contentment, and which was always overshadowed by a causeless melancholy. A sort of idol, spoilt by public admiration, M. de Chateaubriand had been

flattered like a monarch, and had paid the penalty attached to power; he had become intoxicated with himself." These are Madame Le Normant's words. We think she is severe even to bitterness. Madame Récamier was more just because more indulgent.

She felt that the artistic faculty is possessed, with few exceptions, only on certain conditions which seem almost inherent in its essence. In the depth of her admiration for genius she found that generosity and forgetfulness of self which every woman who loves a celebrated man should be capable of feeling, and without which she will be disappointed and wretched.

We must quote one more letter of Matthieu de Montmorency on this subject: "My letter, lovely friend, was scarcely gone when I saw your charming little handwriting, and I was seized with regret; it has increased, and my whole soul is now filled with remorse. How deeply I was affected when I saw how implicitly you confided in my friendship, and all the efforts of your reason to gain the mastery, and all your melancholy reflections! I have not the heart to find fault when all this ends in giving to you more love for our poor valley,* and to me the ex-

* The Vallée au Loup, where M. de Montmorency had hired a country house belonging to M. de Chateaubriand.

clusive privilege of admission and consolation. I am proud of it for friendship's sake, and I long to go and enjoy the sweet privilege once more. Forgive me this morning's letter; but own it was very natural. Adieu: persist in your high resolve, and ask for help from Him who alone can both fortify and recompense."

M. de Chateaubriand about this time was obliged to sell the house he had built near Aulney in the grounds called the Vallée au Loup, where he had planted with his own hands the cedar he had brought from the Holy Land. Madame Récamier and Matthieu de Montmorency hoped to buy it between them. This cherished project was necessarily abandoned on account of a second failure of M. Récamier's, which took place in 1819. Madame Récamier, in hopes of saving him, had given up 4,000*l.*,—one-fourth of the property her mother had left to her. To avoid the pain of declaring to all her circle that dispersion was absolutely necessary, she made up her mind to break up her establishment, to sell the hotel and the furniture she had lately bought, and retire to the Abbaye-au-Bois, where a friend of hers had lived for several years, from whom she learnt the advantages of that residence. The first and most necessary was economy. No

men were allowed to live even in the exterior of the convent. Her husband, M. Bernard, and old M. Simonard, who was always one of the family, could live in a small lodging close at hand: they could dine with her every day, and spend the evenings with her. By this means the expenses of that liberal hospitality, to which they had all been accustomed, were avoided. Retiring to a convent was retiring from the world; it also enabled her to live alone without the appearance of disagreement with M. Récamier. Being afraid of his habits of speculation, she obtained a promise from him that he would entirely give up all money transactions: he was sixty-nine, and had twice failed; she saw nothing but misery if he began again. She had conformed as much as she could at all times, taking into account her exile and strange position, to the requirements of public opinion; and considering this position and her beauty and successes, the world had been very just to her. This is the more remarkable, because, though very scrupulous both in appearance and reality about herself, her early intimacies with the Bonaparte family and many others not more irreproachable might have injured her reputation: her standard of morality was widely different from that of many of her associates, and the world had been discriminating enough to see it.

We must now picture her in a small apartment with a brick floor on the third story in the Abbaye-au-Bois, a large old building in the Rue de Sèvres, with a courtyard closed on the street by a high iron grate, surmounted by a cross of the same metal. Through this gate you see the square court, and opposite to it the entrance-door of the chapel, and another small one which is the entrance to the *parloir* of the convent. Various staircases ascend from this yard, conducting to apartments inhabited by retired ladies. This was called the exterior of the convent. Madame Récamier only inhabited this third floor for a year, and then removed to a very pretty small apartment on the first floor, the windows of which looked on the convent garden: here she remained until 1838. But we now revert to the day of her first entrance into the convent, when dinner assembled the little colony in the very small and crooked apartment. Madame Récamier did not find it easy to raise the spirits of the party; but in a few days all the world found out the road to this out-of-the-way place; and the visitors included some of the most eminent men of the day for rank and talent. She would say, many years afterwards, that when she lived in her crooked brick-floored apartment on the third story, she felt more certain that she was sought for her own sake,

and took more pleasure in her success than in her grand house in the Rue du Mont Blanc. Her *cellule*, as M. de Chateaubriand called it, was soon as cheerful as all places became when she inhabited them. Hither every night came Matthieu de Montmorency,—always late because his duties as *Chevalier d'honneur* to the Duchesse d'Angoulême required his attendance till she retired to rest; for him the *Supérieure* had consented that the outside gate, which had always been closed at eleven, should be permitted to remain open till twelve. Until his death these evening visits were never interrupted.

From the very beginning of M. de Chateaubriand's daily visits to Madame Récamier he became the first object of her life. Though peculiarly governed by his imagination, he was the most methodical man in the world in his daily habits. He wrote a letter to her every morning, and arrived at three o'clock precisely. He was not a shy man, but very reserved. He disliked company, and she admitted no one at his hour without his consent. The circle enlarged by degrees; but at that time, all the mixed or casual company she saw came in the evening, when he was not there. All her habits were modified to suit his tastes. Madame Récamier had been till then the object round which others

revolved. He was now the centre; and perhaps the self-forgetfulness now required of her elevated her character.

In consequence of the murder of the Duc de Berri the "Ultra" ministry came in. Matthieu de Montmorency, as Minister for Foreign Affairs, went to the Congresses of Verona and Vienna, and, after much difficulty on the king's part, M. de Châteaubriand, then ambassador in London, was sent to join him. M. de Chateaubriand's very numerous letters leave the impression that ambition at that time had complete possession of him, and that Madame Récamier was the devoted confidante of all his hopes and fears. On the 26th of December 1822, M. de Villèle, Minister of Finance, refusing to fulfil what Matthieu de Montmorency had promised at the Congress, the latter sent in his resignation, as he did not think it strictly honourable not to keep to the very letter the fulfilment of his agreement with the European powers. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was then offered to Chateaubriand, who had remained at Vienna, who was a favourite of Alexander, and who had appeared to M. de Villèle more disposed to agree with his measures. He writes to Madame Récamier, "I refused Villèle at twelve. The king sent for me

at four. He kept me an hour and a half preaching to me; I resisting. At length he ordered me to obey. I obeyed. Thus I remain with you, but this ministry will kill me. Yours." We see no sign of death in what follows; but he was fond of such affected phrases. He had ardently desired to declare war with Spain, and to conduct it. This ministry of M. de Chateaubriand's was in his own eyes the culminating point of his life. His party proclaimed him the first statesman and writer of his time. His great literary reputation in the beginning of the century had given him a voracious appetite for praise, and he was not proof against the dizziness which seizes poor mortals in high positions.

Although Madame Récamier sympathized entirely with the joy and triumph of her illustrious friend, she could not but feel that his access to power had destroyed all the calm cheerfulness of her previous life; her peaceful days were troubled by the agitation of his. Those former pleasant interviews every day at the same hour were prevented by cabinet councils, sittings of the Chamber, &c. And not merely his habits were altered; his temper and character had not withstood the intoxication of the world nor its flattery, and especially of that portion of the world to which he was most susceptible,—the fine ladies, who

wished to charm the melancholy poet and great statesman as *they* were charmed by him. Chateaubriand ever protested that his pure and devoted affection never could cease to be hers; that Madame Récamier was, and ever would be, "the star whose soft light guided his path," as he called her in a poem addressed to her long afterwards. But he did not follow this star undeviatingly; he was led out of the path by more than one will-o'-the-wisp. Matthieu de Montmorency could not but feel that M. de Chateaubriand had now the place in the cabinet which, from a delicate sense of honour, he had given up: Chateaubriand had sided with Villèle against him; and, once in the cabinet, had made Villèle follow the very measures to which M. de Montmorency had pledged himself at Verona, and thus got all the credit of them. His tenderness for Madame Récamier inspired Montmorency with the most delicate and constant vigilance in concealing how much he felt this conduct, in order that her position between him and his victorious rival might be free from pain and constraint.

Many years afterwards she told a friend that, feeling a sentiment so perfect as that which had once filled her whole mind, losing all its charm, and dwindling into nothing; feeling, moreover, that she

might not always have the self-control to refrain from reproaching Chateaubriand, and thus throwing a gloom over the past, and leaving unpleasant recollections of quarrels and reproaches — to avoid the danger of such a painful end to so bright a period, she resolved to go far away, as it were, to cut down the tree before it withered away. Many affections might be saved and come to life again if no recollection of quarrels, harsh words, truths told in bitterness, which leave an indelible scar, had not filled the mind and obliterated all that preceded. Many friends might learn by this conduct the wisdom of parting for a while at times of irritation, and might again meet with no remembrance but of their first affection; but there is scarcely an act in Madame Récamier's life that might not give a lesson of wisdom to her sex. She quitted Paris for Italy in November, 1823; the health of her adopted niece being the ostensible reason. M. Ballanche could not comprehend existence where she was not, and prepared to follow. He had a charming companion in the son of an old friend and compatriot, M. Ampère, then about twenty-two, who had been introduced by him at the Abbaye-au-Bois, and who became as devoted to Madame Récamier as any of the earliest friends of

her youth. Perhaps nothing can show her peculiar charm so well as the attachment of this young friend. He had lost his mother when an infant, and he found in Madame Récamier all the sympathy and interest that a beautiful young mother gives so lavishly to an affectionate son.

This departure for Italy was a terrible effort to Madame Récamier. If there could be any doubt as to the cause and as to the truth of the account she gave of it to a friend five-and-twenty years afterwards, M. de Chateaubriand's letters would remove it.

He writes thus :—

"No, you cannot have bid adieu to all the happiness this earth can give. If you go, you will soon return, and you will find me what I was and ever shall be. Do not accuse me of what you alone have done." In another letter he says: "You see you are mistaken; this journey is useless; if you go you will soon return." These were written before the day of her departure. She left Paris on the 2nd of November. The next letter says: "Always fearing to hurt your feelings when you think so lightly of mine, I write these lines in time to reach you at Lyons. On Thursday I shall be in Paris, and you will be there no more; you would have it so. Will you find me on your return? You don't care. To

one who, like you, has had the heart to trample on everything, what signifies the future? But I shall ever hope and wait; I never did cease to love you." In another: "Your resolution was so sudden that doubtless you supposed it would bring happiness to you. Why should you care for letters?" There are many more written in this querulous tone; they continue about five months. Madame Le Normant supposes the others were lost; but Madame Récamier told a friend that he had been a year without writing to her. However, she never ceased thinking of him; and when, on the 6th of June, he was dismissed by Louis XVIII. in the most abrupt manner, she entreats her friends to write all the particulars to her. The reason was his disagreement with Villèle, who proposed lowering the five per cent. government stock to four—a measure which, considering the first terms of the loan, was thought dishonest by Chateaubriand, and by all those who had studied the question; therefore he would not defend it. This was the second time he had gone out from honourable motives: the first was in 1816, for having attacked a measure contrary to the Constitution in his greatest political work.*

This honourable conduct ever commanded Madame

* 'La Monarchie selon la Charte.'

Récamier's devotion: in her eyes he was the personification of the noble in character, and the first literary genius of his time. Matthieu de Montmorency, ever faithful to himself, forgets the past and expresses his generous approbation. He writes: "His behaviour is simple, noble, and courageous; he went quietly back to his former place in the chamber." The Duc de Doudeauville, however, who was of the Villèle party, and soon had a seat in the cabinet, often complains of the violence with which M. de Chateaubriand now attacked the government, both in the 'Journal des Débats' and in his own pamphlets; he was one of Madame Récamier's best friends, and he assures her in his letters that if she would return she might be of infinite use in softening these asperities. It is a certain fact that the virulence of these pamphlets, joined to their talent, did the Royalist party a great deal of harm. In September, Louis XVIII. died; Charles X. succeeded him, but kept the existing ministry in power.

In May, 1825, Madame Récamier returned to Paris; M. de Chateaubriand hastened to see her the moment he learnt she was at the Abbaye-au-Bois. He was in raptures at her return, and not a word of reproach was exchanged. She saw by the delight with which he returned to his former habits what

respectful tenderness he entertained for her. All the stormy clouds, the querulous exactingness that had once disturbed the serenity of their days, as well as the capricious and temporary neglect that had sometimes been her portion, were at an end: he was now what he had been when she first knew him; and she now understood that the sacrifice she had imposed on herself for the sake of her own dignity had its full reward. From that time his sentiments were unalterable. She once told a friend that ten years afterwards they would talk over those days when alone; and so much vivacity remained in their feelings that they would at that time go over the past and complain with a warmth they did not give way to at first, when probably the joy of meeting effaced for a time the recollection of past discontents and suffering. All this, joined to the pleasure of returning to her home, and of finding in comfort and health the trio who depended on her for the cheerfulness of their old age, gave her some of those moments of unmixed happiness which can only be of short duration.

In 1825, Matthieu de Montmorency was elected a member of the Academy, and in January, 1826, he was named to preside over the education of the Duc de Bordeaux. It seemed just the place he ought

to occupy; his nomination was one of those rare cases in which a good man is honoured as he ought to be; and it seemed also not unreasonable to hope that by the education of the heir to the throne, Montmorency's virtues would have a lasting effect on the happiness and improvement of a nation. This was not to be. He appeared in perfect health; but two months after this nomination, while kneeling in the church of St. Thomas d'Aquin, on Good Friday, at the most solemn moment of the religious ceremony appointed for that day, his head was observed to sink lower and lower, as if he was absorbed in prayer. Those around him feared at first to disturb his devotions; they looked again, and the spirit was fled. This cruel loss was mourned by Madame Récamier to the last day of her life.

Matthieu de Montmorency's widow, who now retired into the country to give herself up to charitable works, took a room at the Abbaye-au-Bois, that when she came into Paris for a short time she might see more of Madame Récamier. She writes the most touching letters, and nothing can show better the pure affection of these three persons than one or two phrases in them. After praising Madame Récamier, she says: "Ah, madame! make *still* greater efforts (in religion) that you may join in heaven him who

has so well deserved to go there before us." In another she says: "I will speak frankly, madame; you can scarcely believe what interest I take in your earthly life; but I take a far greater interest in the life which awaits you in eternity. That word says everything. You are so kind to me—he loved you so much, and you too loved him so well; . . . how many titles to my affection!" The Duc de Laval, his cousin, and apparently a man given to the world and its frivolities, was as afflicted as his most serious friends. In a letter to Madame Récamier he says: "Was there ever a more fraternal sentiment, more sympathizing, more unalterable? I say it to you, dear friend—I own it without false modesty, I never had any merit and value in my life except in those acts in which I joined in fellowship with my angelic friend."

It is impossible to help recurring once more to public events; Madame Récamier's life was so entwined with them. In 1828 a liberal ministry was again formed, after eight years, during which the Ultra party had been predominant, though somewhat modified by the presence of M. de Villèle. As M. de Chateaubriand's political writings had greatly helped to overthrow the late ministry, it seemed to follow that he should occupy a place in

the new cabinet, but to this Charles X. never would consent.

The embassy to Rome, being the first in dignity, was the only one that could be accepted by him; but the Duc de Laval had filled it to every one's satisfaction, and no one but Madame Récamier could have induced him to give it up in favour of a man whose political conduct he completely disapproved; especially as it was a place that peculiarly suited him. But she persuaded her old friend and earliest admirer to accept the embassy of Vienna in exchange for that of Rome, and his letters show with what infinite grace he made the sacrifice.

"One word, dear and ever dearest, in answer to your letter. It is so kindly towards our long friendship that I cannot delay answering." He consents to her request, and says: "In spite of all appearances" (against M. de Chateaubriand) "you must be right."

During the eighteen months Chateaubriand was at Rome, he sends accounts to her of the events of his embassy—the death of Leo XII., the conclave, the election, &c., &c. These letters have been thought too numerous to insert in the 'Souvenirs,' but to this I cannot subscribe; they would be too valuable as materials for the history of the Restoration, not to make us regret their omission.

He complains of being ruined in purse and in health; but as Madame Récamier is my subject I quote one letter only, as relating to her sentiments:—

18th April.

"Yesterday, Good Friday, I thought I was dying, as your best friend died on this solemn day. Then at least you would have found some resemblance between us, and perhaps you would have identified us in your heart."

This shows that her devotion to M. de Chateaubriand never cast into shade the sacred friendship she owed to her departed friend. In 1829 the former came to Paris, and it is pretty evident with some idea that Charles X. would offer him a place in the cabinet. It was the great mistake of Chateaubriand's life that he never could see to what extent he was disliked by the two kings of the elder branch, although he had devoted his life to the cause of legitimacy. While in the Pyrenees, where he was sent for his health, he heard of the Polignac ministry: he hurried back, and requested an audience from Charles X., to warn him; this audience being refused, he tendered his resignation of the embassy in the spring of 1830.

In the beginning of 1830 M. Récamier died at the Abbaye-au-Bois, where his wife had obtained leave to

move him in his last illness; he was eighty, having preserved his gaiety and good-humour to the last. She had lost her father and his friend Simonard a few years before; her niece had been married two years to M. Charles le Normant. She therefore now lived alone, but M. Ballanche and Paul David dined with her every day. She was with a party of friends at Dieppe when the news of the events of July reached her. Terrified at what might happen; anxious about her niece, who had just been confined, and about M. de Chateaubriand, who had left Dieppe on the 27th, she set off the following day, and arrived at Paris on the 30th. Her astonishment was great when she found that her carriage could not enter the town, and that she was obliged to walk from the end of the Faubourg St. Denis on foot, accompanied by her maid and M. Ampère, who had returned with her. They had to make their way for about three miles through barricades, some of them eight feet high, unpaved streets, narrow and crooked, full of holes, and crowds of ragamuffins and people standing idly staring about them. All the shops were closed, and there was not a cart or a horse in the streets. Those only who have seen Paris in revolution can form any idea of the scene.

Though other revolutions have thrown that one

into the shade, it had a character of its own which has been wanting in the subsequent ones. Many honourable men joined in it; for the motive was really the defence of the laws.

With the fall of the elder branch, and the revolution of 1830, terminates the second epoch of Madame Récamier's life, for her position was again totally changed. During the last sixteen years, and especially from 1820 to 1830, the most distinguished men for rank and talent among the Royalists composed a society rather select and exclusive than numerous; but the names now so familiar to us, as representing the literature of constitutional France, MM. Cousin, Villemain, Guizot, Thiers, Mignet, Thierry, Rémusat, and others, then called *La Jeune France*, were little known and never seen in it—with one brilliant exception. This was M. Villemain, who was something more of a Royalist than the others, and whose conversation was the most finished specimen of the art, and made him courted by the most exclusive *salons*. But in general the Ultras and Liberals did not mix.

This *Jeune France* party were studying, thinking, and writing—all alive with hope and confidence both in themselves and each other: they had their favourite

resorts; and never had society been more animated since 1780, with the men of which epoch they had another resemblance, for they all hoped France would be regenerated by their means. The Ultras since 1820 had held all the power in their hands, and it would be difficult now to believe how low in their opinion stood those who were soon to take their places, and whose reputations have since thrown theirs into the background. But there reigned a strong and disinterested conviction in each party that its own system was for the good of the country: the Liberals proved it by not truckling to the reigning powers; and the Ultras afterwards by renouncing all connection with the new government. The latter had now leisure to devote themselves to society: they were the richest, the highest, the best mannered, and had most taste; and a practised ear might detect by the peculiar elegance of style the conversers who belonged to this class. Exclusiveness added a mysterious and imaginary value to the *salons* of the Faubourg St. Germain, as they were called. But the Liberals had more ideas, and broader and more varied interests. They were often conceited and unpolished in manner, but eloquence was found amongst them alone.

Madame Récamier's admiration for talent had

made her resist the exclusiveness of her friends; but the Liberals before 1830 were poor and proud, and stood aloof. Now they were in the sunshine of prosperity, and when not too much occupied were happy to associate with their predecessors, who, however, generally disdained them.

The fall of the Bourbons, which destroyed the system M. de Chateaubriand and his friends had made such efforts to establish, could not but be considered by them as a most disastrous event. We cannot say that Madame Récamier's convictions were all on their side. She had suffered from the tyranny of Bonaparte, and loved liberty; and though her sense of justice was often dimmed by patriotism, it never was perverted by party spirit. She disapproved of their unwearied efforts to oppose the national tendencies.

One day, about 1832, when the Duc de Laval was recapitulating what the revolution of 1830 had cost (and certainly, if his account were correct, it was a bad bargain), "Yes," he said, "France has spent all this to get rid of us," meaning the nobility as a caste. "And France," Madame Récamier replied, with an arch look, "does not think she pays too dear for it." She appreciated the good and high-minded intentions of the Royalist party, but she knew the nation misunderstood them, and was reluctant to receive even

good at their hands; and nations *must*, perhaps, sow their wild oats. Though her most intimate associates were of this party, she always kept her independent opinion; but she had the highest respect for all sincere convictions when not influenced by bad passions, by overbearing pride on the Ultra-Royalist side, or by irritable envy, as was the case among the Ultra-Liberals.

Thanks to these sentiments the Abbaye-au-Bois became the resort of almost all the remarkable men of the various parties. Her oldest friends, the Ultras, had now plenty of leisure for conversation. M. Ballanche, who was completely converted to the *régime* of Louis Philippe, would forget his usual placidity, and fly into a passion when Henri V. was talked of. Another frequent visitor was M. Genoude, the proprietor of the 'Gazette de France,' the Ultra-Royalist paper, the first to advocate universal suffrage as a bait to obtain the Republican alliance against Louis Philippe. The immorality of political parties thus advocating opinions they detest, in order to injure their opponents, has been one of the chief causes of the present prostration of public spirit in France.

M. Ampère was one of the most agreeable members of *La Jeune France*, and brought many to the

Abbaye-au-Bois who had never before been in contact with the Ultras. By degrees new men of talent appeared, and some of these exerted themselves to obtain admittance to Madame Récamier's circle; others, like M. de Tocqueville, rose suddenly into renown, and were sought by every party.

When her friends were in power, Madame Récamier's constant care had been to soften their asperities, to listen to their plans, and to sympathize with their disappointments. She now had the more difficult task of persuading M. de Chateaubriand not to conspire, and not to make alliances with Republicans, to which result his hatred of Louis Philippe constantly tended. She was the confidante of all the Royalist conspiracies, and not less of the Bonapartist ones. Long before the first attempt of Louis Napoleon, Madame Salvage, the well-known confidante of the queen Hortense, came every day to tell her of those plans which resulted in the Strasbourg enterprise. She heard some of the republican plans from the friends of Carrel, and she said one day, "What afflicts me is that not one of these parties has a real love for the country!"

During Casimir Périer's ministry everything was quiet; after that the insurrection in La Vendée broke out. It may easily be imagined that during

such events political discussions often ended in disputes, and when they grew too violent, it required all the grace and address of Madame Récamier to keep the peace.

During the Duchesse de Berri's adventures, M. de Chateaubriand was kept in a state of constant excitement. He made himself her champion, and went on two occasions to Prague to reconcile her to the family; but she had ruined the party, and the austere Duchesse d'Angoulême was the only one who pitied her, because she judged from her own deep feelings that her light-minded sister must be very unhappy. It is pleasant to see from M. de Chateaubriand's memoirs that the most virtuous person of the family was also the most compassionate.

M. de Chateaubriand was at last convinced that his political career was closed, and Madame Récamier's thoughts were constantly employed in giving an interest to his life. He had always been subject to *ennui*. It was now a malady. We have heard him say he often wished he could make it settle in his leg, for then he could have it cut off. He had for some time been writing the memoirs of his life; and about 1833 or 1834, either because he wished, like Charles V., to have a foretaste of the opinions of posterity, or because Madame Récamier thought it would

amuse him, they decided to invite a small and very select party to hear a fragment of the first part of these memoirs. They admitted four or five of his contemporaries, and as many more of the young generation, whose impressions might be considered a barometer of the modern taste. The experiment completely succeeded. The reading began at four o'clock, they dined at six, and went on again from eight to half-past ten. Not only did attention never flag, but no one knew that he had listened between four and five hours. The memoirs described most lucidly and charmingly the scenes of the writer's childhood, his family, his earliest impressions, the manners of the times. Though the whole has since been published in the 'Mémoires d'Outre Tombe,' those who heard the first reading felt as if they saw but the dead body when they read it in print. M. Le Normant, who officiated, was a perfect reader. In some of the scenes, the tears that stole unconsciously down the cheeks of one or two of the audience (the younger portion) gave more satisfaction to the author than all the well-turned compliments of his old friends.

This put him in high spirits. The readings continued for months about once a week. He went on writing, and read what he wrote to Madame Récamier alone in the first instance. The audience increased.

All Madame Récamier's good sense, quick tact, and knowledge of society were exerted in selecting those whose sympathy with the author would be sufficient to outweigh their political hostility, those who could forget their political hostility in literary pleasure, or those who had the vivid sensibility to enjoy and to show enjoyment. M. de Chateaubriand's political opinions made this sifting necessary. The young generation looked upon him as the upholder of the *ancien régime*, who would willingly have brought back the feudal laws; they could not understand that a man devoted to Charles X., the violator of the constitution, could think otherwise than the rest of the Ultra party. The old-fashioned Royalists, on the other hand, looked upon M. de Chateaubriand—who for years had never ceased attacking the government of Charles X. in the most virulent articles and pamphlets, and who had always maintained that liberty and the charter should be respected—with the same dislike which Charles X. had felt, and had shown by the pertinacity with which he had ever opposed his entering the cabinet. Of those Royalists who wished for a limited monarchy, many had accepted Louis Philippe; and M. de Chateaubriand's opinions appear at this distance nearer to his *régime* than to the former; but he had the most intense dislike to Louis Philippe himself. He was

governed by his imagination. Grand old chivalrous France standing up before him took away his judgment. The good plain common sense of the humane and managing monarch of 1830 was totally displeasing to his fancy. From all this arose the scantiness of his political influence with the elder branch (when compared with his power of writing down his opponents) and also the short period of his sway. His real power lay in the popularity of his writings. He could not go into any small town in France without receiving an ovation. Considering the various parties M. de Chateaubriand had offended by rejecting a part of each of their creeds, it was not surprising that Madame Récamier had need of all her tender devotion to him to conciliate them and to keep up these exciting readings for more than two years.

Her first object was M. de Chateaubriand; but she had other friends, and M. Ballanche was a source of uneasiness to her. At his father's death he had inherited a moderate independence. He came to Paris that he might look at her every day till his death. From that time he lived on his capital for seventeen years, never taking thought for the morrow. He had now spent all, and began borrowing. He never spoke of this to her, but as the lenders were her friends, she knew it. It is im-

possible to say what straits he might have come to if a sister had not died shortly after he had exhausted his fortune, and left him enough to pay his debts and live upon. A small literary pension was also obtained for him in 1837. His habits were simple, and he seemed as happy as ever when on the brink of ruin.

But M. de Chateaubriand's affairs were much worse. He had contracted large debts when ambassador at Rome, and was a very bad manager. *He* was not silent, and his difficulties cost her many anxious thoughts and sleepless nights, when an unexpected resource suggested itself to her. The readings of his memoirs came so much into vogue, the celebrity and the rank of most of the auditors, and a certain difficulty in getting admitted, caused them to be so much talked about, that people who had no pretensions to literary interests, fashionable men, fine ladies, Russian princes, &c., vied with each other for admittance. This was a valuable resource against *ennui;* but it had its disadvantages: and too much pruning to please these audiences was injurious to the genuine spirit and flavour of the memoirs. Nevertheless the fashion spread; and booksellers, hearing that they were to be published at his death, began to send proposals. These were coldly received, the advantage not being at first perceived; this coldness increased

the offers. Chateaubriand's distresses were known to the Royalists. No *one* bookseller, however willing, could afford the high price demanded in ready money. At length certain of the Royalist party agreed with the booksellers to pay a pension for his life, part of it to go to Madame de Chateaubriand if she survived him. The publisher was to be the sole proprietor of all the memoirs already written and to be written; when he entered into possession of them he was to pay the subscribers from the profits. This contract was entered into in 1837. We have given these details, as it is probably the first time that a man has sold his life to live upon it. Chateaubriand himself abhorred the transaction, and often alluded to his being sold, body and mind, as a worse fate than a slave's.

He was writing also the life of the Abbé de Rancé, the founder of La Trappe, and a translation of Milton, and with the profits of these and the sale of his house and garden in the Rue d'Enfer he paid his debts; giving up to the Archbishop of Paris the asylum founded by the piety of Madame de Chateaubriand in the beginning of the century, for aged and impoverished priests. Her active charity had contrived to maintain twelve old people in great comfort. It was a great trial to surrender this charitable foundation.

Towards the latter half of 1837, Madame Récamier

had a cough which brought on a gradual wasting away. During the worst part of this illness, M. de Chateaubriand and M. Ballanche might be seen walking in the court of the Abbaye-au-Bois, in a cold winter morning, watching the doctor as he came down from her apartment into the court. They did not venture to ring, lest she should find out they were anxious. M. de Chateaubriand's beautiful white silky hair, blown about by a cold wintry wind—his physiognomy the very image of despair—formed a striking picture.

It was about this time that the following note must have been written:—

November 4th.

"I bring this note to your door. I was so struck with terror when I was not admitted yesterday, that I thought you were leaving me. It is I—oh remember it is I—who am to go first!"

And again:—

"Never speak of what will become of me without you; I have not done such evil in the sight of God that I should survive you. I see with joy that I am ill, that I fainted yesterday, that I get weaker. I shall bless God for this, if you will not mend. My life is in your hands."

Madame Récamier could only whisper, and even

that was forbidden. As the winter advanced, she was removed into a house easier to keep at an equable temperature than the old-fashioned Abbaye. But still she wasted away; still she was silent.

In January a hard frost came on; and about the middle of the month the thermometer out of doors was ten degrees (Réaumur) below the freezing-point; and that day she recovered her voice. Whether she changed her treatment immediately or not, certain it is that a few weeks afterwards she went out driving every morning. In six weeks she returned to the Abbaye to receive M. de Chateaubriand, and to resume all her former habits. She was convinced that the doctors had been mistaken, and that she never got well till she adopted a bracing system. They had ordered her to the south; but she could not bear to leave M. de Chateaubriand. Her delight was great on returning to their former life. It had been since 1831 nearly uniform. He went to her every day at half-past two, and read to her whatever work he was writing; they talked of it, she gave her advice; no one was admitted till four, when the intimates dropped in. These were tolerably numerous; the friends of her youth, some ten years older than herself, faithful to the fashions of their time, came almost every day. It had always been

the custom in France for intimate society to assemble in the evening; but as Madame de Chateaubriand was a confirmed invalid, and never went out at night, her husband during the last eighteen years of his life always spent his evenings at home with her. This was the original cause of Madame Récamier receiving at four o'clock. Her example was soon followed, and afternoon receptions became the fashion under the name of *les quatre heures*.

Of these the most regular were the Duc de Laval and Duc de Doudeauville, both among the last specimens of two different species of the old French *grand seigneur*. When a new book appeared of any value, it was read and talked of, and the author often asked to be presented; but if any one praised M. de Chateaubriand in any book or newspaper, advances were always made to him. If Madame Récamier remarked that one of these new comers had the power of amusing M. de Chateaubriand, he was encouraged, invited, made a friend. Several of Madame Récamier's friends were members of one or other of the Chambers, and always came in between four and six, to relate what had passed. If an interesting debate was expected, they would promise to come and give an account as early as possible. Nothing remarkable in private or public ever passed

that was not known there sooner than elsewhere. Whoever had first read a new book came to give an account of it; a sort of emulation made each *habitué* anxious to bring something to the common stock.

Political discussions were so hot during the first three or four years, that the old and young, who generally belonged to opposite parties, would say very sharp things, and sometimes argued till all moderation was forgotten. We remember one instance where M. Augustin Périer, the elder brother of Casimir, who always defended Louis Philippe, was affronted by some of the young Ultra-Liberals; but Madame Récamier, whose voice was remarkably soft and youthful to the last, put in one of those pretty, arch, well-turned phrases, which diverted the affront into a joke or a compliment. This, like feathers interposed between two swords, put an end to the combat. And yet with all her sweetness she could be angry at an injustice. Politics were the predominant subject during these first years; but literature by degrees acquired more prominence.

Certain customs were much observed; and as the social habits for which old France was so celebrated are fading away, we may enumerate a few of their leading features.

Tête-à-têtes in a low voice were entirely discouraged. If any of the younger *habitués* took this liberty, they received a gentle chiding in a real *tête-à-tête* when everybody was gone. There were generally from six to twelve persons. Madame Récamier sat on one side of the fireplace, the others round in a circle. Two or three stood against the chimney-piece, and spoke loud enough to be heard by all. Whoever had an observation to make contributed it to the common stock. Madame Récamier spoke little, but threw in an occasional word; or if a new person entered who happened to know anything of the subject going on she would instantly question him, that the others might be aware of it; otherwise it was his place to try and understand. If any one in the circle was likely to have any special knowledge, she would appeal to him with an air of deference; if he chanced to be unknown and shy, her manner raised his spirits. Some, who before they frequented the Abbaye could only talk to one or two persons, soon learnt to put their ideas into the compact form fitted for several. The number who were thus drawn into the conversation secured this advantage, that talking of the weather or of one's health, or any other egotistical topic, could scarcely be indulged in long. Some-

times a chance visitor would come in: occasionally, if a lady, she would sit down by Madame Récamier, and in a low voice tell her something extremely unworthy of so much mystery. Meantime the circular conversation was going on, and Madame Récamier could not attend to it. On one occasion of this sort, after the lady was gone she complained of having lost the thread: some one said of the whisperer, "No doubt it was from timidity." "When people are too timid to speak they should be modest enough to listen," was her answer—which ought to become an axiom.

The talent for narration is much cultivated in Paris. Sometimes one of the *habitués*, standing up, would tell his story; it was short and pithy. A wise or witty remark would shoot forth from one of the circle; then a quick repartee rose up like a rocket from another side. If a *mot* was particularly happy, Madame Récamier would take it up and show it to the audience as a connoisseur shows a picture. She was not fond of talking. If she knew an anecdote *à propos* of something, she would call on any one else who knew it also to relate it, though no one narrated better than herself. No one ever understood more thoroughly how to show off others to the best advantage: if she was able to

fathom their minds, she would always endeavour to draw up what was valuable. This was one of her great charms; and as the spirits of the speaker were raised by his success, he became really more animated, and his ideas and words flowed on more rapidly. She had heard Madame de Staël, whose greatest delight lay in this management of society, say: "I have not conducted the conversation well to-day," or the reverse. She certainly had not the depth of Madame de Staël, but she had wonderful tact in this art. She had once been very shy: long habits of social intercourse had overcome this shyness, yet there was a slight appearance of it left. She had in reality complete self-possession, but never seemed as if she had. There was a *velvetiness* in her manner, as well as a slight shade of doubt; but this was unconscious. She was in fact a very modest person, and that took away any air of decision; besides which, she would always look at both sides of the question: judgment was the faculty for which she was most remarkable. She was often consulted in cases of difficulty by people who knew her but slightly. She would ask for time to reflect, and give a frank and conscientious opinion. She had a saying that must have often come back to the memory of many of her friends: "He does not

know how to arrange his life." As she had gone through difficult times there was some danger that her precepts might make those who followed them too calculating and worldly wise; but she was saved from this herself by an unusually sympathizing nature. Again, she had seen so many specious virtues and hollow sentiments that she was rather incredulous; but when she saw any act of disinterestedness, quite genuine, she had still the capacity of admiring it with the warmth of youth that has never been disappointed: and the faith of the experienced has a tenfold value, for they have acquired discrimination and do not waste their enthusiasm. She was peculiarly charmed with simplicity, and dreaded exaggeration. Speaking of a person who had fine qualities, but from the violence of her feelings and the vivacity of her fancy kept those she loved in constant agitation, she said: "Il n'y a que la raison qui ne fatigue pas à la longue." This is so profound a truth that it becomes an axiom to those who have once heard it.

There was nothing pretentious nor pedantic in this talking for the whole circle. Let any one imagine a large family party in England: they have all an interest in each other. One comes in and tells what he knows; they would not think

of getting into corners and whispering if they were perfectly at their ease. Another characteristic of this *salon*, which dates as far back as the Hôtel Rambouillet, was the keeping seriously to one subject. Madame Récamier delighted in discussions, and would take up a subject day after day. The most common fault in modern society, especially in large parties, is a sort of feverish fidget, as if people were expecting some wonderful sight,—an incapacity of paying attention. There is also a feeling, if there are eight people together, that each must have a dose of small talk; a private conspiracy seems to be going on in four *tête-à-têtes*, as if it was a great misfortune to hold one's tongue and listen. One reason that made French society more agreeable was the habit of the same persons meeting often at the same house, where they knew they would be understood, and tried to be amusing. Of course many failed, but all attached importance to it. Children in France are found fault with if they do not explain themselves well and clearly, or if they use vulgar expressions; slang is totally inadmissible; they are much conversed with and encouraged to talk. A schoolboy in England is a very honest fellow, and we esteem him; but if he had been taught to explain himself in his mother-tongue, and did not begin

everything with: "I say, old fellow," we should not hear so many gentlemen of thirty years of age hum and haw whenever they are going to speak, for *conversing* it cannot be called; nor can we see anything against morality in being able to express our thoughts, instead of burying them in our own honest bosoms.

In 1838 Madame Récamier, who after the first year had inhabited the small apartment in the garden on the first floor, which M. de Chateaubriand called the *cellule*, had a large *salon* (which before that she had let) newly painted, and received in it till her death. She gave musical parties once a week; and Mademoiselle Rachel, the following year, recited there the part of *Esther* for a charitable subscription; from that time she never undertook a new part without having given the first recital at the Abbaye-au-Bois. Her complaisance was extreme. Once a lady arriving after the first act, Madame Récamier requested her to begin it over again, and she did so. Madame Récamier did not continue these large parties more than two years: they were like others of their kind, but included a larger number of remarkable foreigners than were to be seen elsewhere. She preferred her intimate circle, where she could enjoy general conversation and the society of those who were most amusing.

M. Ampère was every day at the Abbaye-au-Bois: his conversation was like a stream of sparkling water, always fresh, never fatiguing. Some witty people are always epigrammatic, and keep the attention ever on the stretch; you think you must keep pace with them; if you flag you will be run over. His wit was so natural you never thought of anything but the amusement he gave you. In addition to this, his general information was wide and various. No doubt Madame Récamier greatly enjoyed his conversation herself; but she used all her powers of fascination to make her friends devote themselves, not to her—that would have been easy—but to M. de Chateaubriand, whom they thought selfish; and so completely did she succeed, that they were all as deferential to him as if they had loved him as she did. It was so with them all; but M. Ampère,—the most entertaining, the most courted,—whom every lady was anxious to have in her *salon*, was ever entirely at his service; and this was solely to please her.

At times, even now, M. de Chateaubriand could himself be extremely agreeable; his distinguished and dignified manners, his high polish, his fine face, impressed all those who saw him with respect; he was never ill natured, and if sarcastic his sarcasm

was only vented on the government: he was highly courteous, and silence was his strongest expression of hostility. Lately a caricatured likeness was given of him in a weekly publication; it described him as habitually placing himself in a position expressly calculated for the light to fall on him, as if sitting for a photograph: this is utterly false; he always had the dignity and simplicity of a gentleman. Any indifferent artist can make a caricature; only the best can render the delicate modellings of living nature, which, even in faulty faces, are often full of grace. His conversation also was perfectly simple: he never used the quaint words and far-fetched phrases he so often employs in his writings; neither did he deal in the abundance of commonplace, fine empty phrases which the celebrated man who pulls him to pieces is apt to indulge in himself. In 1843 Henry V. went to London, and wrote to ask him to come and see him; and though Chateaubriand could scarcely walk, he did not hesitate to comply. He writes—and it recalls some of Walter Scott's pictures of loyalty, beautiful in their *un*reason,—"I have just received the recompense of my whole life: the Prince deigned to speak of me when surrounded by a crowd of our countrymen with all the warmth of youth. If I could I would tell you all about

it, but instead of that I can't help crying like a fool."

Madame Récamier's eyes as far back as 1839 gave some anxiety to her friends: in 1844 she could no longer see to read, though she could write. She was now entirely dependent on her friends; and M. Paul David, the most devoted of them all, read to her every evening. He was not a good reader, and she was sensitive to this defect, perceiving which, he secretly took lessons in reading at the age of sixty-four, that his defect might not be a drawback to her amusement. When she spoke of her impending blindness to a friend who expressed her sorrow, Madame Récamier almost comforted her, saying it was an affliction so much lighter than many others that it might easily be borne. This friend has since felt convinced that she then perceived M. de Chateaubriand's memory and imagination to be failing, and that this was the really great and unbearable affliction to which she alluded. In spite of the anxiety which both Madame de Chateaubriand and Madame Récamier felt at the thought of his travelling when he could scarcely walk, and his hands were so disabled that he could not clutch a stick, he persisted in going to Venice in 1845, to Henry V.; but this was his last effort of loyalty.

Madame de Chateaubriand had been ailing all her life: she died in the beginning of 1847; and hers was the first of that series of deaths which did not cease till the circle, once so pleasant and so animated, had all disappeared. Madame de Chateaubriand had been married at sixteen, just before the revolution. Almost immediately after this marriage her husband emigrated, and for many years led a wandering life. Partly owing to circumstances and partly to his own vagrant disposition, he was prevented ever settling anywhere until the return of the Bourbons, which was shortly before the commencement of his friendship with Madame Récamier. Madame de Chateaubriand had spent the greater part of her time in strict devotional practises, and had founded a retreat for reduced priests. M. de Chateaubriand in his memoirs gives an account of her and of this pious foundation, which was the chief interest of her life.

Madame Récamier underwent the operation for cataract in one of her eyes; in the other the cataract was not advanced enough to insure success. She was to be kept perfectly quiet and in total darkness, and almost alone. Immediately after the operation, M. Ballanche was seized with inflammation on the lungs; in three days all hope was over. She crossed the street and attended his death-bed, and in her

agitation and tears for this perfect friend, all hope of recovering the sight of her eye was lost. He was buried in the vault of the Récamiers, so that death did not separate them.

M. de Chateaubriand was in 1847 incapable even of rising from his seat; his memory so much gone that he has been heard to ask for a friend dead twenty years before, and his other faculties were much impaired. Madame Récamier had endeavoured to conceal this from all, even from herself. She could not bear to tell her dearest friends that the intellect she had so entirely admired was gone; and she attributed her own depression to his weariness of everything. He had so completely lost all power of attention, that he could not read; no wonder if he was weary. But he still had a degree of plain sense. He said nothing foolish; he knew his faculties were going, and had the feeling of a poor proud man who hides his poverty. It was even more painful than childishness; yet at times a gleam of his former self would flash up and surprise every one. One day a lady calling at the Abbaye made a speech in praise of Robespierre's virtues (we are not aware in England that a knot of democrats uphold Danton, Marat, and Robespierre as the first heroes and patrons of equality), M. de Chateau-

briand, all at once aroused from his silence, broke out into a description of the deeds of these men, deeds he had witnessed. Never in his best days had he expressed more eloquent indignation. All were silent with awe. They felt as if a prophet raised from the dead had spoken. Thus at times the flame flickered and sank down. In this state he was carried daily to the Abbaye; he seemed only to live during the three hours he spent with Madame Récamier; and one day, to her astonishment, he entreated her to marry him. She was decided in her refusal: she said: "Why marry at our age? If you do not like to live alone, I am ready to come and live with you. If I were younger, I should not hesitate; I would joyfully accept the right to devote myself to you. But I *have* this right; age and blindness give it to me; who could object? Let us change nothing." M. de Chateaubriand was not satisfied; but she did not tell him her real reason, which was most touching. To a friend she said with perfect simplicity: "If I had thought he would be happier, I would not have refused; but the only cheerful moments he has in the day are when he comes to the Abbaye. I am convinced that if I lived with him, that slight excitement which gives a little variety to his existence would be lost." In this decision she thought of him alone.

Madame Récamier was persuaded about two months after the death of M. Ballanche to go for a short time to Maintenon (the Duc de Noailles') to repair her strength; her nerves were much shattered by that death and her own unsuccessful operation. During this short absence a friend of Madame Récamier's, who lived in the same house as M. de Chateaubriand, went every day to spend half an hour with him, and daily to write a few lines to her; it was not till then that the terrible ruin of his mind was completely revealed. It was only then that could be measured all the tenderness, the patience, the strength of mind which had enabled her so completely to conceal his state, that many believe to this day that he died with all his faculties entire, and abuse him for his indifference to public affairs. There was no want of ordinary sense, but the power of thinking was completely gone: he could not read a line nor follow up an idea in conversation; but his affection for her, his longing for her return were intense. When the friend referred to took leave, he would take her hand and say with a look of ineffable gratitude: "Adieu, madam, how good you are to visit me in my utter misery!" Madame Récamier had always contrived to keep up a cheerful atmosphere around him; and if any one could make him laugh, what a pleasure it was to her!

The winter of 1847 passed away, no one suspecting what 1848 was to bring, till the tocsin and the cannons of February, and the rising of the populace like the roarings of a mad bull, put all common sense and moral feeling to flight. Terror took possession of all; a red spectre stood before every imagination. During the time between February and the end of the civil war in June, wherever you called the ladies were sitting with disconsolate faces, their hands in their laps, saying: "Providence can alone help us,"—thus increasing by their imbecility the general malady. But still the *habitués* went to the Abbaye, and even the merry laugh often went round at the queer stories about the Republicans, and the farces that were acted to show their absurdity; for, to do them justice, they did not attempt to muzzle the press or the theatres. M. de Chateaubriand, like an old oak struck by lightning, beautiful in its decay, sat, seemed to listen, and smiled when one of his favourites entered; but in reality he was indifferent to all. About March a bad cough which he had grew worse; in May he could not leave his room. Madame Récamier went to him every day at the hour he used to go to her; her friends joined her, and sometimes some old friend of his own. During the terrible days of June, when he was asked what he thought, he said he cared nothing about it.

The cannons and the thunder on the worst day seemed to vie with each other. He was a little roused by the death of the archbishop. In spite of the constant firing, the barricades which she could not see, and the *garde mobile* stationed at the corner of every street, Madame Récamier, though blind and nervous, never missed a day in coming from the Abbaye to the Rue du Bac. Fortunately there were two unfrequented back streets, by which she persuaded the coachman to drive. Since her blindness she had been unable to walk in the streets, and as coaches were in danger of being taken and piled up for barricades, the drivers were unwilling to go out.

It was most painful to her not to see M. de Chateaubriand's countenance. She often whispered to the friend who was always there: "How does he look? What expression has he? Does he seem in pain? Does he ever smile?" And this anxiety to see him had made her undergo a second operation five months after the first, but all in vain. She was never to see him again. Before these terrible days, he had taken to his bed, and rose no more. Madame Récamier would leave the room to conceal her tears; his eyes followed her, but he scarcely ever spoke, and not once after the extreme unction had been administered.

A high fever gave an unnatural colour to his

cheeks and brightness to his eyes. She could not see him, and his silence seemed cruel, but he could no longer speak. She dreaded his dying in the night, when it might be impossible to send for her in time; and it was a comfort to her that she had a friend living up stairs in the same house who could give her a room, where she spent three nights. On the morning of the 3rd of July, at about seven, she was called down; in about an hour all was over. The friend did not go down with her, and knows not if he spoke a last word. The current of her life seemed dried up. She wished for nothing in the world but to be good enough to die.

In April 1849 the cholera reappeared. The ravages of 1832 had left a general impression of terror at the very name, to which Madame Récamier had always been peculiarly susceptible. She was not afraid of death, but in that form it was dreadful to her. Madame Le Normant proposed that she should move to the *Bibliothèque Nationale,* where she lived. This appeared to her other friends a great mistake; and they did what they could to persuade her to remain, for the Abbaye was in a less crowded part of the town than the Bibliothèque; but they did not succeed. Three weeks after her removal she expressed to her friend Madame Salvage her desire to return, and said

she was determined to go back to her home the following week. Two days afterwards she was seized with a strange sensation; she soon felt convinced that there was no hope, and sent for her confessor. At ten next day all was over. She suffered with patience the terrible death which she had always dreaded.

After seeing Madame Récamier exiled because she would go to see Madame de Staël against all prudent advice; after seeing her lose the chance of recovering her sight because she would go to attend M. Ballanche on his death-bed; after seeing her for eighteen years devote herself to M. de Chateaubriand, old and infirm, we shall not take the trouble to refute the opinion of those persons who have maintained that Madame Récamier was a very charming person without much heart. Madame Récamier was not perfect: in the case of Benjamin Constant she was to blame; she thought so herself, and wished his letters to be published after her death to justify him. It was certainly a great mistake to have prevented their publication, as it has given occasion for surmises utterly false. One day when she related that circumstance of her life, she said she had been very unhappy herself when she saw how great was the unhappiness she had caused, and she added "J'avais trop de qualités pour mes défauts."

That Madame Récamier took great delight in the love she inspired is certain, yet she was anything but a cold-hearted person. Her nature was intensely social; she longed to be liked by all she saw far more than to be admired, and to this was due the charm for which she was so celebrated; for with much natural grace and softness, she not only made all pleased with her, but with themselves also; and this without any effort, but simply from the importance which they felt that she really attached to obtaining their good will. But what was more rare was her attention to her oldest friends; it never flagged; she was as anxious to be agreeable to them after thirty years of constant intimacy as if she was trying to captivate them on a first meeting.

Madame Récamier's was not an ordinary life: she was born just before the commencement of strange times, and if not an actor, she was a counsellor and witness in a greater variety of events than falls to the share of most individuals. But her life is especially curious as illustrating the different position held by women in France from that which they occupy in other countries. Chivalry originated in the south of France, with all its complicated code of sentiments and customs, and left an indelible

trace, not merely on the manners, but on the whole imagination of France. But it was a disposition natural to the race that was developed by that institution, which in its turn influenced the manners of the nation. For in consequence of the power it gave to women it enabled them to produce lasting effects which but for them would never have existed. It is in order to trace these to their first source, and to follow their development, of which I wish to give at least an idea, that I shall now attempt a sketch of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, when these causes and effects were first apparent, and of the seventeenth, when, if they were not really more influential, at least we have much better means of judging them. The power which they possessed, and which they used in the improvement of society, has filtered down into every part of the social system, and is the reason of that great difference between their position in France and that which they hold in all other countries.

CHAPTER II.

CHIVALRY.—THE ELEVENTH CENTURY.

FROM the conclusion that Madame Récamier's life was an illustration of the different position of women in France from that which they have filled in other countries, I was led to examine into the origin of this difference; but to trace all the numerous and imperceptible steps by which they have advanced from the state common to them in all barbarous ages, to that of being the legal possessors of half the capital in France (not of the income), would be to give the history of society and civilization,—an undertaking far beyond my power. I shall therefore confine myself to a slight sketch of the two epochs which are the starting-points of their progress, and leave out the intermediate steps; thus following the plan of the dramatist who in each act gives the passage of his hero's life that will best develop his character, and the most striking events in which he has played a part. If I have related the lives of

a few individuals, it has been in subordination to my plan of tracing the progress of the whole sex and of society, and for the purpose of giving a more precise picture of both by living examples than I could have done by generalities, which leave only a vague notion in the mind, and no living image. My selection has been determined less by the comparative merit or celebrity of the lives than by the degree in which they show, either the position of women in their time, or the influence exercised on society by strong individualities. That the chivalrous gallantry of the twelfth century, which gave such an impulse to this position, was itself an effect as well as a cause in France, seems proved by the fact that, although chivalry spread all over Europe, the lofty condition of women was nowhere maintained to the same extent as in France when the fashion ceased. Their extreme influence in the latter country can only be accounted for by one of those primitive and inexplicable characteristics which distinguish one race from another.

It is however a fact so universally acknowledged as to appear a commonplace, that chivalry improved the condition of women everywhere, though why and how such a complete change was effected has not yet been explained. That the spirit of chivalry

was to defend the weak against the strong, and that it protected them in common with the oppressed vassals, does not account for the species of worship they obtained in the twelfth century, contrasting as it did in so marked a degree with their previous state of degradation. We find in almost all barbarous nations that women occupy the same low position; but as far as history can penetrate, it has happened but once that they have been suddenly raised up, as by a gigantic lever, to the opposite extreme. When this wonderful social system went by degrees to decay, it left them a different species from the women in lands over which chivalry had not swept. A few facts may illustrate this remarkable truth of history; and will at any rate show that the human mind has gone through many noble phases, almost forgotten, and that other and higher aspirations than desire for material prosperity have been necessary to hoist up half of the human race. It is for these facts that I request the patience of my readers. I will first recall the old barbarous times by one story, for though we know what the state of women was before the age of chivalry, we can never impress it too vividly upon our minds.

Grégoire de Tours relates that Rigonthe, the

daughter of Chilperic and Fredegonde, was granted in marriage by her father, in 598, to the son of the king of the Visigoths, who reigned at Toledo. Deputies were sent to Paris to receive the bride from her father, and to conduct her to her husband. She parted with many tears and kisses, as the good bishop informs us, from her mother, who has not left a reputation for tenderness, but who gave, nevertheless, fifty waggons loaded with gold, silver, jewels, rich dresses, and all the valuable gifts that it was customary for the Frankish chiefs to present on the marriage of a daughter of their king. An army of four thousand men, besides various chiefs and officers, with four of the highest Neustrian nobles at their head, was thought necessary to protect the young bride and her treasures. They proceeded to Toulouse, but before they had reached Orleans several of the trusty chiefs had deserted, carrying off part of the gold and silver, and others continued on the further march to drop off in the same way. The bridal party was entertained in the towns through which it passed, for they were all Neustrian, and belonged to Chilperic. The people were mulcted for the purpose, and a hostile army could not have done more mischief. Every place on the road was pillaged, from castle to cottage; all the cattle of

the peasants were carried off; and the grapes, being just ready for the vintage, these festive marauders cut down the vines at the root to save the trouble of gathering them. Rigonthe was to rest at Toulouse, the largest town she came to, before entering the dominions of her husband. Toulouse was under Duke Didier, who had lately been appointed governor of the whole province by her father. Tidings of the death of Chilperic reached him soon after her arrival; on receiving them he immediately entered the palace which had been prepared for her reception, carried off her treasures, ordered her to be confined and strictly watched, and left the town to join some new political party formed in consequence of the king's death. It was then only that she learnt this event, and dreading the return of the governor, she contrived to escape from her guards, and fled to the church of the Daurade, dedicated to the Virgin, to claim the right of asylum. Of all her grand escort one trusty servant alone remained, whom she sent to her mother to implore help. The Neustrian chiefs of her escort carried off what had been saved from the duke. When the latter returned he had her forced away from the altar, and turned out of the gates of the city. At length her mother sent a messenger to negotiate a treaty of

alliance, and he was to bring back the princess; but so obscure and forlorn by this time had become the position of the young bride, that he was some time at Toulouse before she could be found. He at length took her home: she had no clothes but those she wore when torn from the church of the Daurade into the open country, where she had wandered about till she was in tatters, and in a state of utter destitution. After her return we hear little more of her: the prince of the Visigoths never seems to have inquired after her; and Queen Fredegonde, generally so vindictive, takes no notice of the affair. Before the year is out, we see the same prince sending for another bride, the daughter of Brunehaut; and the matter passes by as a common occurrence. I have given this story, not as one of the most savage of the times, but as one which shows how little the youth and the sex of the young princess availed her: the slight importance that is attached to the whole affair is the most significant fact of all.

Charlemagne endeavoured to rekindle the few embers that remained of Roman civilization; his father, Charles Martel, had expelled the Arabs, united the disjointed kingdom, and facilitated the task of re-establishing order and unity in the empire. The Carlovingian dynasty is one to which all who

have imagination cast looks of ardent and searching curiosity; for though the twelve Paladins, the battle of Roncesvalles, Orlando's good sword Durindarte, and his horse Bayard, the Bishop Turpin and Angelica the Fair, may be individually all fables, there is a bright halo of poetry round each of these names, which even the bareness of the facts as recorded in the old chronicles cannot extinguish; and were it only for the poets, from the author of 'Fer-à-bras' down to Walter Scott, who have thrilled whenever one of these facts has appeared in the dry annals of the time; were it only for the sympathy which these romantic associations have excited, our interest would be justified. That these stories originated in real facts belonging to these localities, which the border ballads first commemorated, and by degrees altered, can scarcely be doubted. We find to this day the Brèche de Roland, made by the sword Durandal when the hero was dying; the story was recorded in one of the old ballads, and this trace remains of it. It is equally impossible to doubt, from the quantity of Provençal romances founded on Charlemagne's passage into Spain, that these traditions delighted both poets and people long before chivalry was thought of; but when the Provençal poets and chivalry did appear, this became their heroic age;

they looked back upon it as the Greeks must have looked upon the days of Orpheus and Theseus. Nor was their reverence for it such a mere matter of fancy as might at first sight appear; for out of these mysterious thickets of history a spirit came forth just as spontaneous and fresh as a spring issues sparkling out of the ground in some deep glen; and like the same little rill, after murmuring a long time in dark solitary woods, it emerged into light, became broader and deeper, and poured down like a river, bringing to us the majestic civilization that overspread the country. How many curious and active spirits have endeavoured to trace a river to its source! but can any stream, however beneficent, be compared to the poetry which was the source of our modern civilization, whose infancy was concealed in these unknown regions of history? It cannot relate its own birth, nor how it was nourished; but when this young muse, all charming with unconsciousness, began to speak, it was in a new tongue, so soft, so full of tenderness and grace, and the sentiments she expressed in this musical Provençal were so refined and enchanting, that all around were enthralled; the fierce barons laid down their spears for the harp, and women became sovereigns. Perhaps this is all fanciful nonsense;

it looks like it. Yet if a fairy has appeared to us in a dream, what shall we say when on waking we find a real, a tangible gift by our side; how can we account for it? Such a gift was the Provençal poetry and the spirit of chivalry. They seemed to start out of the ground as well as the Provençal language. Not long after 1050 the latter had acquired all its delicacy, and could express feelings and refinements unknown to our modern tongues.

Dates and facts will confirm the mysterious origin of the modern Muse; but I must say a few more words concerning the time that more immediately preceded her appearance. While the border ballads were being recited or chanted to the people about Narbonne and Toulouse, telling them of Orlando's feats and of his death, and of Charlemagne's expedition over the Pyrenees, the barons and the clergy were in a constant state of hostility. Whoever travels even now in the by-ways of these provinces will find the ruins of large monasteries, some coeval with Charlemagne, surrounded by the vestiges of moats and fortifications, such as the abbeys of Fontfroide, of St. Guillen du Désert, and of La Grasse. The fortifications were for defence against the violent and overbearing feudal classes, who more than ever plundered the churches and threatened their independence.

The continual care of the clergy was necessary to preserve their property, their importance, and their dignity. The lower clergy had become more ignorant and debased than ever in the tenth and eleventh centuries; but this very excess brought out the master-minds in the higher ranks;* and among various attempts made for self-preservation, a striking innovation appears to have been effected by them in the mode of arming the youthful nobles. Up to this time the old German fashion had been retained, according to which a senior warrior, surrounded by the important men of the tribe, armed the youth by throwing across his breast the baldrick, to which a sword was appended. It was a very important ceremony, for it marked not only the change from boyhood to manhood, but proclaimed the youth also to be a warrior. Towards the year 1050 we find a priest performing the ceremony, and he performed it nowhere but in a church: thus it borrowed from religion part of its sanctity, and the young neophyte took a solemn oath to defend religion, the clergy, and the oppressed. This innovation leaves no doubt as to the intentions of the Church to reform the warlike classes. The warrior thus became the defender of those he

* See 'Histoire de la Poésie Provençale par C. Fauriel,' published in 1845.

had persecuted; and as the champion of the Church he could no longer be quite the turbulent barbarian he had been. In one word, he was a knight in all the historical and characteristic acceptation of the word. All through these barbarous times the clergy had taken part with the people; for, however ignorant they were, and however obscured Christianity might be by superstition, some of its spirit was left. That they made common cause with the people at that time was evident from the oath imposed on the youthful warriors; and the same purpose is still more evident in the famous council held at Tuluge, composed of bishops and archbishops, who had also persuaded some of the feudal lords to join them. There it was decided that from Friday night till Monday morning, and also at the time of the year most important for agriculture, all combats were to cease. This decree was well known afterwards by the name of the Truce of God. It gave the peasants some time to cultivate their fields, and was enforced from the sacred motive of celebrating the mass on Sundays. The Crusades were also proposed in the same council several years before Peter the Hermit proclaimed them; and it is not overrating the wisdom and foresight of some of the ecclesiastics to suppose that the drawing off the most turbulent spirits, as well

as enlisting them in a great religious enterprise, might have been one of their motives. Thus chivalry in its origin and earliest form was an attempt on the part of the clergy to mould the brutal and destructive force of the feudal warrior into a disciplined power for the preservation of the Church and of society. It was an appeal to what was generous and humane in these warlike classes against what was violent and barbarous. But chivalry could not long remain what the clergy had intended it to be. There was a momentary alliance between them, but the conflict was soon renewed. Such turbulent spirits might be moved by religious zeal to defend the clergy, but they had too much independence and self-will to continue long under any direction. Yet with all this wildness and waywardness there was a general tendency towards refinement in the higher classes, quite independent of the reforming efforts of the clergy, and a degree of respectful attention to women which tended to bring on the empire they were soon to assume. Magnificence and liberality, too, and a generous use of power, began to be considered the natural accompaniments of high rank. All these nascent sentiments seemed to fit into chivalry so completely that they soon almost predominated over its first purpose; but before long another element, little

contemplated by the clergy, though they were partly the cause of its power, predominated over all the others. The institution of chivalry being created by priests for the defence of religion and of the oppressed —by priests, too, vowed to celibacy, and whose idea was general reform—it was impossible that they should do otherwise than require from the knights a high degree of austerity, somewhat approaching to that which their own vows imposed. Accordingly we find in all the romances that austere morals were as indispensable a requirement as valour and devotion. In the famous romance of the 'San-Graal,' the purity of the knight's life and conduct is the condition for conquering the wonderful vase; and it is evident that this requirement was as important and as generally complied with as all the others. The result was to change the whole position of women; for who does not know that a commonplace woman is much nearer to a divinity when adorned by the imagination than a Helen when seen in all the familiarity of daily intercourse! In consequence the sentiment of love, which the priest had not thought of proscribing, became not merely the most exalted of passions, but a real religion. It was naturally the highest of the feudal classes who first took to chivalry, and who added to it the brilliant graces I have described;

through them the ideas and manners which they introduced not only spread in their own class, but by degrees penetrated the whole of society in the south. From the time that chivalrous notions became general, a great and rich baron could no longer enjoy in sloth and luxury the advantages of his position. To conform to the principles of chivalry he must make a generous use of his power; he must prefer honourable toil to repose; he must intervene for the punishment of all unjust acts committed far and near. A troubadour says: "A lord without merit may eat and drink and lead an easy life; but he who would increase in worth has huge toils to go through: he must go about helping and giving according to time and place." At a time when all rights were yet uncertain, and individual exertion was continually needed to defend them, when violence was the habitual feature of society rather than the fault of any individual, it was no easy task for the feudal chief to maintain even his own rights; but his oath required of him to roam far and wide, and at all hazards to defend the claims of the helpless. It was, in fact, an impossible task; the beauty of chivalry consisted in its inculcating obedience to all generous feelings and impulses. It was a new moral code, then first invented, and it was and

is called *honour*, whose first and only law is never to put danger or failure in the scale against its own high behest. The vow to defend the helpless and the lowly was at first instinctively included in the vow to defend religion; but towards the twelfth century it became the paramount obligation; and it was in the performance of this duty that the spirit of chivalry unfolded in its most original form. Frequently the acts of oppression and violence in which it interfered were domestic transactions which the monks of the eleventh century did not think worth recording; but fortunately we have the epistle of a famous troubadour, Raymbaud de Vaquieras, to his friend the Marquis of Montferrat, written between 1099 and 1103, which shows that knights *did* go about helping distressed damsels, and that romances *were* taken from realities. Boson d'Aguilar, a vassal and friend of the marquis, loved a young lady, Isaldina Adhemar: her parents, opposed to their union, shut her up in the castle of the Lord of Malaspina. Boson d'Aguilar fell very ill; and his friend the marquis, seeing that nothing could cure him but the obtaining of his lady-love, undertook an expedition by night, got into the castle, carried off Isaldina, and married her to her lover. The following is translated literally by M. Fauriel

from the Provençal, and is so good a picture of the times that I give the whole of it:—

"Do you, my lord marquis," says the troubadour, "remember Amonet the jongleur, and how he came to Montaut and told you the news that they were going to carry off Jacobina to Sardinia and marry her by force, and how you began gently to sigh and to think of the kiss she gave you, only a few days before, on taking leave, after she had so prettily entreated you to defend her from her uncle, who was trying most unjustly to take away her inheritance; and then how you suddenly called to horse five of your knights, and how we set off that very night after supper—you, Guyet, Hugonet d'Alfar, Bertandon (who guided us so famously), and myself; for why should I leave myself out in such a fair history, I who seized and carried off Jacobina just as they were dragging her on board? Scarcely had we got possession of her when a hurrah was raised both on sea and land, and close at our heels galloped both horsemen and footmen. Hot was the pursuit; how we did fly! and just as we thought we had escaped so dexterously, the men of Pisa came after us; and when we saw them rush past in such close ranks! when we saw such fine halberts, such glittering helmets, and flying banners, it need not be asked if

we were alarmed. We concealed ourselves between Albenga and Final, listening to the horns echoing far and wide, and to the whooping and hallooing of many a squire: do you remember how we remained there two days without meat or drink? But on the third evening we reached the Lord of Puyclair's; he was so delighted with our feat, and honoured us so much that he would even have given you the hand of his daughter, the fair-faced Aiglette, if you had shown a desire for it. And on the following morning, in your right of lord paramount and great baron, you gave his son Jacobina to wife, and restored to her all the county of Vintimil, her lawful inheritance, despite her uncle, who had tried to defraud her of it."

Another story is told where the Dauphin of Auvergne, a powerful baron, and "one of the most courteous knights in the world," says the biographer, takes part with a wife against her husband in favour of her knight. It is less moral, but quite in accordance with the code of chivalry, for a knight was bound to take the part of all women:—be the case what it might, they must be right because they were women; this was the reaction from the recent time when might was right. Next to valour unbounded generosity was the highest virtue of chivalry; when the knight had nothing left of his own to give he

might take, providing it was for others. Albert de Malaspina, accused by a troubadour of robbery, answers, "Yes, par Dieu, Raymbaud, I own that I have taken; but it was to give away, not to hoard." Another troubadour exhorts a young baron to have no porter at his gate who might stop the stranger, the troubadour, or the wayfarer from claiming hospitality. Bertrand de Born, a rollicking knight and troubadour, who has written the finest ode in Provençal on the pleasures of war, says, "A baron is noble who gives away without measure, who burns his bow and arrow," to make a bonfire for the stranger; "but he is a curmudgeon, he who has hoards of wine and corn, or a horse he calls his own." We must never forget that these ideas immediately succeeded times when the feudal lords harried the poor, and plundered the churches to enrich themselves and increase their own domains.

From all this it is evident that the duties of the knight were as arduous as they were disinterested; and even the spirit of the eleventh century could scarcely have kept him up to the necessary pitch of enthusiasm, which lies at the very root of chivalry, without a more immediate and dearer excitement than the distant hopes of religion. This he found in love. Imagination, which gives intensity to all our

natural and common feelings, was the reigning and inspiring spirit of the eleventh century, as much as the spirit of machine-making is of the nineteenth,—and a wonderful lever it was. The supreme end of the enterprises of the knight was to please the lady of his choice. *She* was to be the judge of his merit and the arbiter of his fate, and her approbation was to be his reward. Of this ideal lady I must now give some account. Long before the eleventh century women legally inherited fiefs, with all the powers and duties belonging to them. From this civic capacity marriage became the most usual and certain means for a feudal chief to increase his domains and his power. Ambition being the ruling passion of these chiefs, all considerations of morality, of choice or affection, were entirely excluded from their marriages. The baron who sought a wife was entirely guided by political interest; and the baron who gave his daughter in marriage was actuated by nearly the same motives. Thus among the feudal classes marriage was merely a treaty of amity or alliance between two nobles. Unions thus founded on the interests of unbridled ambition or complicated political calculations were necessarily frägile, for new and unforeseen circumstances were constantly arising and presenting superior advantages; and in

such cases there was but one remedy—one however that was always at hand—repudiation. A feudal chief had sometimes been married a few months, when some new event happening, a greater advantage presented itself in a fresh alliance, by which he might increase his territory; he immediately discovered that his wife was his fourth cousin, and the church was ready to pronounce a divorce. It would be difficult to express all the humiliation and debasement women suffered from this shameless use of divorce. That marriage should be a bargain was bad enough; but these repudiations, by which a high-born lady was often passed over from one baron to another five or six times in two or three years, reduced her to the state of the unfortunates whom we place out of the pale of society. When she offered opposition, every species of constraint was used to obtain her consent. Sometimes she suffered from mere caprice, as in the case of Pierre d'Arragon, who divorced his wife to marry Marie de Montpellier, that he might add her vast inheritance to his own dominions; but taking a dislike to his new wife after a few months, obtained a divorce from her also. These repudiations brought on frequent wars, for the lady claimed her dowry, and the husband tried to keep it. In the case of Marie, the town of Montpellier rose up in arms to

defend her rights against her husband. We cannot suppose for an instant that women were base enough to give or sell their affections to such shameless contractors: in that they were far superior to the Chryseis and Briseis of ancient Greece. They submitted to the usages of their time; they accepted the bargains which made them countesses or duchesses; made what efforts they could to remain with the greatest chief, and were proportionately mortified when the next contractor was of a lower degree than the last. It does not appear that they even supposed any love could be expected. In one of the earliest romances we find a wife following her husband devotedly through all his misfortunes, not from love, but because it was right. Marriage was a social position, and it was honourable to fulfil its duties, as it would be to keep one's word or to pay one's debts. Women could not change the destiny to which they were doomed from their birth; but as refinement increased, it is evident that these changes of husbands had become odious to them, from the efforts they made on their marriages to insure themselves against the dreaded repudiation. When chivalry became general, many ladies made it a condition of their marriage contract that a number of the knights, who were either vassals or in the

military service of their future husbands, should be answerable for the indissolubility of the marriage. These knights were to enforce the execution of the contract, even to the extremity of opposing their liege lord; but from the innumerable repudiations recorded in the documents of the eleventh and twelfth centuries it is evident that this security was of little avail. During the ages of barbarism preceding the eleventh century no sign of any such effort appears; and in that century, when nothing less than the enthusiastic imaginations of chivalry could have dragged society up from the depths into which it had fallen—when the impassioned imaginative moral sentiment called honour first appeared among men, women had sunk lower than any other portion of society; it was especially those who were placed as a mark at the very summit that were the most debased. This prolonged barbarism of the feudal marriage produced a moral and social phenomenon most singular.

Of all the germs of civilization which we have seen fermenting and unfolding in the eleventh century, the most striking and novel was the respectful enthusiasm for women. Whether due to their own proud bearing and improved moral feeling, or to the exalted imaginations and austere principles of

chivalry, the facts and their results are equally curious, as showing the flexibility of the human mind, which, when untoward circumstances bend and warp the natural feelings, can change into beauty and grace what seemed at first capable of nothing but deformity. Thus it happened now; for this enthusiastic feeling, finding no place in marriages such as I have described—these being often contracted before ten years of age, and always very early—it was in contrast to these miserable unions that was developed a sentiment which, appearing at the same time with honour and generosity, partook of their nature. If anything can explain the exaggerated pretensions, the refinements and subtleties of the chivalrous sentiment, it is the selfish motives and still more the uncertain tenure of the feudal marriage.

All we know of these sentiments is from the poetry of the troubadours, who have expounded and explained the subtle metaphysics of love again and again in every possible way. According to them love is the supreme principle of all virtue, all moral merit, all glory, and this truth was so universally acknowledged as a fundamental one, that they neither try to prove it nor to vary the expression of it. Love they tell us always manifests itself by a

peculiar state of the mind, an elevation of spirits they call joy in Provençal,* but which would be best translated by *exultation.* This sentiment has its own subtleties, for the joy of the lover is an enthusiastic happiness which increases his faculties; the feminine *joia* is applied only to ladies' love, and is a blissful state of calm felicity. This *exultation* gives an irresistible impulse to perform difficult and wonderful feats of valour or courtesy, to do for every one more than mere good will enjoins, to give away in profusion, to fight at all hazards with every one who will not acknowledge the object of this *joy d'amour* as the most peerless lady in the world; and all this from an exuberance of spirits caused by having found the priceless object. Love being the first cause of all virtue and all moral worth, the first and most serious affair of the knight was to choose a lady whose love and esteem might be the end and recompense of all his efforts. No doubt beauty, youth, and high condition had a part in this choice; but from all we can make out, renown for virtue, grace, and agreeable manners was of still greater importance. A peerless lady was one who united all

* "*Joy d'amour* exprime quelquechose d'expansif et d'énergique, une certaine exaltation heureuse du sentiment et du charme de la vie, qui tend à se manifester par des actes, par des efforts dignes de l'objet aimé."—Histoire de la Poésie Provençale par C. Fauriel.

moral qualities with beauty and rank. The lady's reputation depended much on the poets that celebrated her, and those best sung by the troubadours were the best served by their knights. This was one of the principal points of contact between poetry and chivalry.

There are four degrees in love (says a troubadour), the first is that of *feignaire* (*hésitant*), the second of *prégaire* (*priant*), the third of *entendeire* (*écouté*), and the fourth of *drutz* (*ami*). He who wishes to please a lady, and often pays his court but does not speak, is a timid *hésitant*. If the lady honours him with just sufficient encouragement to permit him humbly to speak of his feelings, he is named a *priant;* and if he is so happy as to be retained as her knight, and she gives him a silken cord, gloves, or a sash, he has risen to the rank of an *écouté*. But if it please the lady to pledge her love to her loyal *écouté* by a kiss, she has accepted him as her *drutz*. The most solemn event in the life of a knight was when, after many feats more or less toilsome, he was accepted as her servant by the lady of his choice. The ceremonial of this installation would suffice to attest the importance attached to it, for it was exactly and invariably copied from that by which the liege lord and the vassal vowed to fulfil their mutual obligations of

protection and fidelity. It thus borrowed the forms of the most sacred contract of the age—the contract by which all society was bound together. Kneeling before his lady, his hands clasped between hers, the knight devoted himself to her, vowed to serve her faithfully till death, and to guard her with all his might from harm and injury. The lady on her part declared she accepted his service, and promised the most tender sentiments of her heart. As a sign of their everlasting union she presented him with a ring, and, still copying the ceremonial of homage, raised him and gave him a solemn kiss—the first and often the only one he ever received. In the language of the time this was called on her part retaining a liege man, a knight; on his part it was becoming her servant, her man-at-arms; and to preserve every possible analogy between this vassalage of love and the feudal vassalage, he called her his liege lord.* Whatever might be the duration or the consequences of this union, it was not lightly

* "Tout cela dans le langage du temps et de la chose s'appelait de la part de la dame, retenir un homme, un chevalier; de la part de celui-ci, se rendre l'homme, le chevalier d'une dame; et pour qu'il y eût toute l'analogie possible entre ce vasselage d'amour et le vasselage féodal, le chevalier pouvait donner, et donnait en effet très souvent, à sa dame le titre de Seigneur au masculin."—Histoire de la Poésie Provençale, vol. i., p. 504.

contracted, and was the most solemn act of their lives. And it often happened that to increase the solemnity they invoked the ceremonies of religion, and a priest was called upon to bless the union of a lady and her knight. When once it was consecrated by an ecclesiastic, this union was supposed to require the same ministry to dissolve it; and nothing can better attest the serious nature of the engagement than the conscientious scruples of the parties, and the simplicity with which they appealed to the sanction of religion, as if so uncertain and lifeless an engagement as the feudal marriage ought not to have over the free and disinterested union of a knight and his lady the superior advantage of a religious blessing. It was in reality an unconscious protest against those shameless contracts, in favour of real indissoluble marriage. However strange these ideas may seem to us, they were universally adopted in the eleventh century. But to comprehend how they arose, we must consider the circumstances that gave them birth, and the development they could not but follow when once admitted.

From the moment a degree of moral feeling penetrated into the minds of the women, from the moment they could reflect, their condition became intolerable. The family affections, now so consoling

and absorbing, when the conjugal tie is unsatisfactory, were necessarily destroyed by the instability I have described. It was not when mothers were bandied about from one baron to another that their children could belong to them: these important heirs of the feudal power were of course kept by their fathers. Chivalry was the sudden outbreak of a higher moral feeling in society, and that women partook of it is clear, or why should they not have gone on as their sex had usually done, when oppressed from the beginning of time — sometimes deceiving their husbands; always grovelling in slyness and slavery? They did not adopt the slavish principle. They openly declared that "love dwells but with the free." But from the same sentiment of honour, they could accept of love only as the principle of noble actions; they could grant theirs only as a reward; base concealment was out of the question. They were proud to be the source of heroism. Their moral feeling, being banished from marriage, took refuge in love, and became identified with it by recognizing it as the incitement to all virtue and the only reward worthy of noble deeds. There have been many who, unable to read more than one page in history, have failed to comprehend that the strange theory of chivalrous love was caused by the

exigence of this irresistible moral instinct of the eleventh century, and was the corrective of what preceded. They have not even seen that the open avowal, that love was impossible in the feudal marriages, was the foundation of the modern notion of honour in women, which decides peremptorily that faith must be kept from self-respect; for the woman whose sole duty towards her knight was to animate him to noble actions, could not help knowing what self-respect meant, and she had most assuredly not learnt it from her successive husbands. Love being, according to the theory of the troubadours, the natural principle and cause of all virtue, it could only be a moral and elevating cause on certain conditions. It must be perfectly spontaneous, depending solely upon itself, and directed to one object alone. Whatever might tend to lower this state or blunt the enchantment, such as the habitual intercourse of common life, imperilled and risked the highest enjoyment of the soul, bringing it slowly down from its noble exaltation to a state of degrading apathy. The first consequence of these notions was the doctrine that love, real love, was incompatible with marriage. A woman could only feel her empire and her dignity as a moral being when every testimonial of affection was voluntary.

The slightest favour granted to a lover might be the recompense of a great action, and thus it acquired a moral value. Of what avail would this be to a husband? However dear any unusual expression of her approbation might be, it was his due, and familiar intercourse took away its high and rare value; it could neither act as an encouragement nor a recompense. A troubadour says, "a husband would act contrary to honour if his behaviour to his wife resembled that of a knight to his lady, for neither could be improved by it. She could give him nothing but what he had a right to." A real incident is preserved which attests that this theory was practically carried to its furthest limit. A knight sought for a lady's favour; she told him she loved another, but promised to take him for her knight if ever she lost the one she now preferred. Contrary to all chivalrous maxims, she married the knight she loved, and the other immediately sued her to perform her promise. She said that far from losing her lover she had married him. The case was carried before a *cours d'amour*, where Eleanor of Guienne, afterwards queen of England, presided. Her decision was that the lady *had* lost her first lover by marrying him, and that she must keep her promise to the second.

It was from the higher classes that the peculiar opinions on the nature of real love and its incom-

patibility with marriage passed into the romances of the time. As history never registers prevailing ideas except unconsciously, we must, to see them in all the frankness and simplicity with which they were felt, have recourse to fictions which show what their influence was on all the delicate shades and varieties of manners. In a Provençal romance entitled Philomena, composed about the year 1100 by some monk of the Pyrenees, a Moorish king named Matron is besieged in Narbonne by Charlemagne. His wife Oriunda falls in love with Orlando. Matron, after hearing Oriunda reproach him with cowardice for being beaten and running away, answers that she has spoken very wickedly, and that all she has said is for the love of Orlando, for which she will be punished some day as she deserves. "And the queen, understanding that Matron spoke from jealousy, said, 'Lord Matron, mind your wars, and let me mind my love. *You* have no dishonour therein, for I love a most noble baron, expert in arms, Orlando, the nephew of Charlemagne, and I love him with the purest love.' Matron, having heard this, left the queen angry and discontented." But, as he made no reply, it is clear that the explanation was quite natural, however disagreeable it might be.

The following passage is still more to the purpose. It is taken from Gerard de Roussillon, one of the

most curious and beautiful of all the Provençal romances. Gerard de Roussillon is in love with a princess. She becomes empress by marrying Charles Martel, and he resigns himself to take for his wife the sister of her he has so long and so fondly loved, whom he still loves, and whom he rejoices to see raised to supreme rank. The new empress and her friend Gerard, after their respective marriages, which are supposed just to have been celebrated at the same time and place, are going to separate indefinitely,—she to preside at the court of Charles, he to repair to his castle of Roussillon. But they ought not, nor are they willing, to part without confirming and consecrating by the regular ceremonial the pure bond of love that has so long subsisted between them. I subjoin M. Fauriel's translation from the Provençal:—

"The next day at early dawn they were all to separate. Gerard took the queen apart under a tree; with them came two counts and her sister, and Gerard spake thus: 'What will you say to me now, wife of an emperor, for having exchanged you for an object of less worth?' 'Say for a most worthy object, Lord Gerard. But true it is that you have made me a queen, and that for my sake you have taken my sister to wife. Be you my witnesses and my sponsors, Count Gervais and Count

Berthelais, and you, my dear sister, the confidante of all my thoughts, and, more than all, thou Jesus, my Redeemer; be it known to you all that I give my love to Duke Gerard with this ring and this bright flower from my necklace. I love him better than my father, better than my husband, and at this parting I cannot refrain from tears.' Upon this they parted; but their love was everlasting, and there never was any wrong between them,—nothing but fond wishes and secret thoughts."

Though so concise, this passage is a complete picture of the beau-ideal of chivalrous love at that epoch. It shows with what perfect security and conscientious calm a great lady, just coming out of the church where she had pronounced her marriage vows to an imperial consort, could vow eternal love to the friend of her choice; it marks on what conditions of reserve and purity this was considered not only perfectly blameless, but quite right; no secret meeting, no mysterious farewell is even thought of. Another remarkable characteristic of the story is the almost sacred nature ascribed to high rank. It was quite right that the princess should fill the high position due to her birth; Gerard applauds himself for helping her to assume it. That marriage was a position that had nothing to do with love is assumed; he married her sister to please her, perhaps to insure to

her the rank of a duchess. In the sequel the sister's character comes out as that of a devoted wife, and shows a degree of unselfish affection, so different from our notions of conjugal feelings, that she brings about a meeting of the lovers after years of separation. But the most remarkable trait of all is the complete devotion of Gerard, who never thinks of himself, only of seeing his lady raised to the rank he thinks she ought to occupy. Possibly this may be thought unnatural; but the simplicity with which the story is told, and its accordance with all we know of the ideas of chivalry, should make us mistrust our judgment about nature. Who, on reading Dante's own account of his love for Beatrice can doubt its character, its truth, or the fact that it governed his whole life? Yet he had seen her but a few times, and in public; she was married, and died at twenty-six. He never alludes to her marriage, yet her image pervades all he has written.

That this was the most ideal theory of chivalrous love is certain; that a milder and more practical theory was generally adopted is evident from much of the poetry of the troubadours, but even this was far above vulgar realities. It was an axiom acknowledged by all that the sensualist was incapable of love; and it could not be otherwise in a system whose first principle was to exclude everything tending to

lower the exalted enthusiasm of the sentiment. But it was difficult entirely to spiritualize passion; some testimonials of affection were allowed. The poems of the troubadours are full of traits which mark their gradations. The following is translated from a Provençal author:—"He knows of love absolutely nothing who would wish to call his lady his own; that is not love which turns to reality," viz., which ceases to be a worship of the imagination and heart, "and the heart gives nothing from duty. It is enough that a friend obtains from his lady rings and silken cords to think himself equal to the king of Castille. If he receives jewels or a kiss once in a way it is enough, it is almost too much, for true love."

Many maxims were current in consequence of these opinions which, though they might not all be put in practice, show how seriously the latter had been weighed and considered. One was that a lady could not accept the homage of a knight whose feudal rank was above her own. According to chivalrous ideas a woman had a real moral supremacy. All that a knight could do for his sovereign lady was his duty and her right; hers was a service whose only certain reward was the honour and the consciousness of having done something to please the object of his devotion. All that a lady did for her

knight, was favour, condescension: her will was right, just, and moral because it was her will. She was bound to one thing only towards him, who, by her gracious permission, had taken her for the object of his thoughts. She was bound to animate him to great actions; as for pleasure, happiness, she owed him nought. She was quite aware that this high position was inseparable from her own proud bearing, which, if lost, would bring love down to a guilty and disgraceful shadow of marriage. From the universal recognition of the dignity of women, and of their moral superiority over their knights, was devised another rule, by which the homage of a knight of inferior, and even very inferior rank to her own was quite allowable to a lady of high birth. The respectful devotion to which she was entitled from her social condition was a certain guarantee of what she would receive as his friend. But the chivalrous code denied her the homage of a baron of higher degree, for fear she might be less exacting and imperious with one whose rank imposed some consideration. Here we again see the undoubting reverence for the gradations of rank. We must remember that all society reposed on the feudal allegiance—an allegiance most sacred because founded on an oath—and that our modern horror of lying, as dishonourable, comes

down to us from this system and this epoch. We do not see a trace of it in the ancient Greek civilization.

All this theory of chivalrous sentiment had its own appropriate language, fixed, precise, and as original as were the ideas it had been created to express. The complete union of ideas, sentiments, and customs which made a knight devote himself to a lady and endeavour to prove his love by acts of chivalry was expressed by one word *domnea*, from *domina*, a lady; from which also the verb *domnear*, to serve a lady, and *domneaire*, which meant a knight employed in gallant efforts. In M. Fauriel's 'History of Provençal Poetry' many more single words are quoted to express ideas which now require a paraphrase in French to give their meaning. This would tend to prove that the language must have been used for those ideas before any of the poems we now possess had been composed, for they appear in them as current ordinary words. Their mere existence is a curious fact; it being probably in the vast repertory of human tongues the first case in which words were invented to express respectful, admiring, and disinterested devotion to women;—a devotion entirely founded on the idea that their love was to be the recompense of noble actions.

CHAPTER III.

PROVENÇAL CIVILIZATION, AND ITS EXTINCTION.

CHIVALRY began in Provence; and to its intimate union with the poetry of the troubadours are due the only certain records that are known of its earliest manifestations, its nature, and its modifications. It is only from these memorials in a dead language * that we can arrive at some notion of a society, still half barbarous, working itself into a state of civilization in which sentiments were first expressed more exalted and refined than any that had yet been arrived at,—sentiments that have given the tone to all modern European literature, and that borrowed nothing from the past. As these sentiments have descended to us in the shape of habits of thought, custom has taken away the edge of our capacity for judging of them as historical phenomena.

* The modern *patois* spoken in the south is the Provençal deprived of most of those refinements and grammatical delicacies which made it a literary language instead of a dialect.

Toulouse was the capital of all the country between the Pyrenees and Alps, designated from the eighth century to the fourteenth by the name of Provence. It was there that the counts of Toulouse chiefly held their court from about 1000 to 1210, and that the Provençal language reached its highest state of perfection. The troubadours considered it as the capital of all learning, poetry, and eloquence; they never mention it without the addition of some term of admiration, such as Toulouse the great, Toulouse the flower, the Rose of all cities, &c. It was the centre from whence the civilization of the south proceeded, extending beyond the Pyrenees into all the neighbouring provinces of Spain (where the dialect is still a degenerate Provençal), northward as far as Bordeaux, Poictiers, and even Bourges, and still more completely and extensively into Italy; all the north of Italy, in fact, including Florence, having adopted the manners, tastes, and poetical traditions of Provence. In all the feudal courts and the little republics of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the Provençal was the language of the higher classes. Therefore when I speak of the Provençal customs, I mean all those of which the south of France, and Toulouse particularly, was the centre and the original source. In the north of France, in Ger-

many, and in England, the king alone could confer knighthood on a villein: a writer who went with the Emperor Barbarossa to Lombardy, expresses thus his astonishment at the different usage of the south:—"To drive away an enemy from the frontiers, and to defend their country, they allow men even of the lowest degree to assume the sword of chivalry, which in France would be regarded as disgraceful,"—that is, derogatory to the order of chivalry.

Over the whole of Provence, chivalry was not only open to all classes, it overflowed the limits of the institution itself; that is to say, independent of the *order*, with its ceremonies and its strict code of laws, the *spirit* of chivalry began to pervade the general tone of thought and feeling: it went on during the twelfth century increasing in vogue till it seemed to take complete possession of society, and its character would be but partially known if considered only among the powerful and rich barons, among whom I have chiefly described its action. The sentiments and principles of chivalry were too disinterested and too absolute to expand freely in the narrow circle of political and feudal interests; the ambition of the feudal chief was frequently in direct opposition to the duties of the knight, and ambition too often won the day.

These lordly warriors were ready enough to adopt from the institution all that brilliant and showy exterior which they themselves had introduced into it, and everything that could add grace and refinement to their lives and habits; but the generous spirit of self-devotion was apt to be left to those who had no broad lands to preserve and increase, no encroaching neighbour and lord paramount to watch or to conciliate. We have spoken of the Marquis de Montferrat, and we might quote other powerful barons who conformed to all the obligations of their vow; but these examples were not the most numerous, and it was the extension of the institution all through society which allowed it to expand to its utmost limits, and produced those original and poetical results which the south of Europe alone presents to us, and which never could have been reached under other circumstances. Another consequence followed upon this extension, and left traces never more to be effaced. As the highest nobles, up to the kings, however they might neglect the more arduous duties of chivalry, were all proud of belonging to it,—as to be a knight was the title that added lustre to all others,—a greater equality became inevitable between the highest feudal lords and their vassals, for the field of chivalrous virtues opened a new career where

the inferior had many chances of equalling, of even surpassing his superior in glory and renown, and the esteem the small feudatory had conquered as a knight was the means of improving his position as a vassal. Thus as early as the twelfth century this intermediate class had considerably risen in moral and political dignity. But the undefined state of the laws in the eleventh century, and still more the absence of all means of enforcing them, were the most potent causes of the high importance chivalry so soon attained. Even the proudest barons were glad to obtain the guarantee of a number of knights in their numerous treaties of alliance, cessions of territory, &c., for the knight was expected to maintain with his sword the right he had guaranteed. Thus they stood in lieu of the whole modern establishment for obtaining justice, and were paid entirely out of this newly found currency of the imagination—honour. But there was one species of contract—one guardianship dearer to them than all; they were called upon to protect and defend the young heiresses against the disgrace of repudiation: it was thus that eighteen knights signed the marriage contract of Matilda of Burgundy with Guillaume of Montpellier, in 1155. Although a large proportion of these knights were of noble birth, they could scarcely be said to belong to

the feudal order, for their family fiefs had long been lost from various causes. Many such took service with some powerful baron; and this military bond was far more free than vassalage, as they could change at the expiration of the stipulated time if they disliked the chief.

But among all the novelties this age presented, the combination of chivalry and poetry was perhaps the most original. Before this, the warrior performed great deeds, and the bard celebrated them; now chivalry and poetry were not merely allied, they were identical, and the knight-troubadour was the favourite hero of the time. The earliest of these, whose poems are still extant, is Guillaume IX. of Poictiers, for some time Count of Toulouse, having married one of its heiresses. He was born in 1071, and his works do not bear the impress of originality either in style or thought. In the history of Provençal poetry it is shown that, long before the troubadours frequented the castles of the high-born and refined, epic ballads were current in the country, sung or recited by wandering minstrels; and that the earliest troubadours were an intermediate step between the unconscious poets of the people, who, like the bard of 'Chevy Chase,' have never been known to fame, and the elegant lyrical poets whose

names and sentiments have come down to us. But the latter, even as early as Guillaume IX., found all the delicate language of gallantry and poetry seemingly established, as well as their custom of visiting the feudal castles. The ladies must therefore have become persons of importance in those castles soon after the year 1000, and before the Crusades, when the phraseology of gallantry was in full bloom. Guillaume IX. was very much of a Don Giovanni, and his poetic gallantries appear to be inspired by the fashion of his time far more than by his own individual feelings. Who was the first knight-poet is not quite so easy to decide as the fact that his poems must have followed, not preceded, both the universal taste for poetry and the devotion of the knight to every accomplishment that might please the object of his worship; for, from the time love had become a worship, and its lays, hymns, the poetical talent became the necessary complement of chivalrous gallantry, and those who had it not at least admired and cherished it in others.

Of about five hundred troubadours whose names have descended to us, more than half were noble. The general taste for poetry was for the lower classes a strong inducement to cultivate the art. A burgher, or the son of a peasant, who acquired

distinction in it, was sure to be a favourite in one or other of the small feudal castles, and when he made his appearance it was a signal for the whole household to rejoice; they immediately surrounded the member of the *gaie science*, who charmed their imaginations, and whose visits were the first and only intellectual pleasure of the age. The social importance thus acquired by professed poets brought them more than mere patronage and kindly feelings; it often resulted in intimate friendship and complete amalgamation between the different classes. Owing to the custom in the south of the equal division of property, by which a small fief was sometimes subdivided between three or four brothers, it became an absolute necessity for some of these to leave their homes—and it was naturally the most energetic and intelligent who went to seek their fortunes. Some, who had nothing but their horse and their arms, betook themselves to the adventurous career of chivalry; others, who had a poetical or musical turn became troubadours or jongleurs, and were certain to find a welcome in every *château*, and the gay and social life so necessary to their art. Nothing warrants us in supposing that the profession of the troubadour who sang his own poems was in the slightest degree derogatory to his rank as a

noble; and there is plenty of evidence that the troubadour by profession, be his birth what it might, could become a knight if he acquired renown: thus throughout it was easy to pass from poetry to chivalry, or the reverse.

These chivalrous troubadours, these nobles in whom bravery and poetry were united, would not have left their natural spheres to roam about the world if they had not been stirring and enterprising spirits. Amongst them were men of poetical imaginations and delicate and exalted sentiments, who could not help carrying into chivalry some of their own individuality, something of the poetry and enthusiasm of their own natures: these formed the most refined and cultivated portion of the chivalric order, and by them its usages were modified according to the variations and improvements of society,—a necessary condition, without which no institution can preserve its vitality. Too poor to distinguish themselves by lavish donations or magnificent *fêtes*, such as the great feudal lords delighted in, but having the advantage of entire freedom from all the trammels and complicated interests by which these were entangled, they could undertake whatever plans they fancied would extend and perfect their order. They might rush into every peril that

was new and strange, if only it accorded with the spirit of chivalry. From this description it will readily be inferred that knight-errantry originated with them: it was the most imaginative of all the developments of chivalry, and for that very reason it turned the heads of the enthusiastic for three centuries; and Don Quixote is not the least among the legacies left to us by the excess of this grand ebullition of poetry in action. The most striking peculiarity of the satire is, that none even of the panegyrics on chivalry leave a more profound impression of its ancient beauty and poetry than this picture of a fine mind thrown off its balance by the solitary contemplation of the ideal beauty that was no more. It is indeed a strange kind of satire,—a satire that makes you delight in its object. Who does not admire the noble Quixote and his discourses on ancient virtue and honour? If I wanted a witness to confirm all M. Fauriel has collected from the Provençal poets, of their exalted notions of love, and self-devotion, where could I apply so well as to the knight's discourses? Cervantes lived when the world was still penetrated to the core with all the recollections of the chivalric ideas, and he has given the truest account of them that now exists. The troubadours are full of al-

lusions to knight-errantry, but it was too familiar for them to give a description of it. From these allusions it would appear that it was rather taken up for a time than as a permanent occupation,—either from disappointment, to accomplish a vow, or to satisfy some one of the numerous poetical fancies which then ruled the world. Raymbaud de Vaquieras tells us in a poem written somewhere about 1100, of his intention of throwing himself into knight-errantry; he says, "To gallop, to trot, to climb, to run, — night-watchings, privations, toils, — you will now be my pastimes. Armed with wood, with iron, with steel, I must endure heat and cold: lonely deserts will be my home; songs of love will be changed for discords and *sirventes*, and the weak I shall uphold against the strong." Here again we see chivalry protecting the lonely wayfarers who must often have stood in need of it.

To the joust, tournament, and all the various forms of challenge, which the exuberant fancy of these ardent spirits invented, must be added another fashion more singular, and partaking more of the earliest spirit of the institution, as first created by the clergy when they alone armed the knights. This fashion too must have been first thought of by those independent knights, who hung loose upon

society, and who could give way to the melancholy fancies peculiar to high-wrought sensibility. The custom was for a knight to retire to some lonely desert, and to consecrate himself entirely to the service of a lady, by taking the vows that were pronounced on entering a religious order: to complete the resemblance the hair was cut round like that of a priest, as a visible sign that his devotion to her was of the same austere nature. This brings to mind Jaques in the forest of Ardennes, and makes us think that Shakspeare, whose stories all originate in the old romantic days, had heard of these recluses. One would like to know the history of the melancholy Jaques. These men, in whose minds love took such an exalted tone, were not the rich barons or powerful feudatories; they were mostly poor knights without fiefs, whose whole earthly possession was a deep impassioned soul and a poetic talent; and they staked their all on the favour of one high-born lady. It is in this poetical and disinterested class that we find nearly all the delicate and original traits that have been handed down to us as characteristic of the love of the days of chivalry.

Among the members of this class we may place Geoffroi Rudel, who, though a prince, had neither

land nor vassal. Fired by the reputation of the beauty and virtues of the Countess of Tripoli, of the house of Toulouse, he fell deeply in love, and celebrated her for a long time in his verses; at length, unable to resist his ardent longing to see her, he embarked for Syria, fell ill on his passage of a mortal malady, and arrived at Tripoli in time to see her once before he breathed his last, but quite satisfied to have bought with his life the happiness of beholding the beautiful object of his long dream, and to see her mourn at his death.* It could only be in such men as these that instances like the story of *Pons de Capdueilh* could occur. He had long adored and served Adelaide de Mercœur; she died, and nothing then remained for him but to go and get killed in the Holy Land. To men like these ladies could command or forbid anything; one word would send them to fight the infidels beyond the sea, or the Pyrenees. They thought the slightest favour not too dearly bought by years of toil and danger, and the objects of their devotion knew that they possessed the power of punishing the smallest offences, even those caused by excess of love. It was these men

* Warton has translated in his 'History of English Poetry,' one of Rudel's poems composed during this voyage. It is beautiful even in the English prose.

who, regarding the sentimental union between a lady and her knight as serious and holy as marriage, claimed the same blessing from a priest. It was these again who came to pray and publicly to celebrate the pious ceremonies of religion at the tombs of those they considered Love's martyrs. We have many proofs, both in Provence and Italy, how deeply the people of all classes sympathized and took part with this class of knights, the most earnest and devoted of all the representatives of chivalry. A story which happened near Perpignan will give an instance of the popular feeling. A troubadour, Guillaume de Cabestaing, was the knight of Sermonde, Countess of Roussillon. Her husband became jealous, and murdered him in a manner too odious to repeat. On learning the horrible truth, the unfortunate woman flung herself from the castle window and was killed. The whole country rose up in arms: the relations of the victims, accompanied by the knights of four counties, with Alphonso, King of Arragon, at their head, all flocked to the spot to avenge them. The castle was taken and destroyed to the last stone; by the king's order, the bodies were disinterred and deposited in the same tomb near the church of St. John at Perpignan; and all the courteous knights and noble

ladies of Catalonia, Roussillon, and Cerdagne, of the Conflans and the Narbonnais, came every year on the day they had died to attend a mass for their souls, and to pray for them; and, what is more, the whole population who had helped to destroy the castle made pilgrimages to their tomb.

The prevalence of these opinions as to the power women had a right to exercise, is even better exemplified by ordinary events and very commonplace natures. I therefore subjoin the farewell address of a knight to his sovereign lady, who, we may suppose, was tired of his homage. He thanks her for having once deigned to accept his love. It is but just, he says, that she should take another friend, if it so pleases her. He will always honour her and think about her happiness. Nothing can ever be indifferent to him that relates to her, and at last he says, "If our mutual vows and our engagements are an obstacle to breaking off our love, let us go before a priest, and he will disengage us. We may then in perfect good faith have another love. If ever I have erred or given you pain, pray forgive me." This is certainly neither impassioned nor otherwise interesting, except to show the respectful acknowledgment of the lady's sovereign power; and as it was expressed by an individual

of no particular originality or imagination, it is the more certain to reflect the general tone of society.

Dante's 'Divina Commedia,' which the great poet of the middle ages has declared he wrote to honour the memory of Beatrice, is the most perfect expression of the love of those days, and will ever remain a noble monument commemorative of the influence of women from the eleventh to the thirteenth century. Dante's mind was completely imbued with all the ideas of his time that had their origin in Provence. I have said, when speaking of the Provençal, that it was the language of literature and good society in all the feudal courts of the north of Italy during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The Provençal poets looked upon the productions of this part of Italy as belonging to Provence, and justly so, for not only had their language been adopted for common use, but the Italian poets wrote in no other at the time. The only subject of their verse was the favourite one of the age, and they had no words in Italian to express the ideas and feelings that originated elsewhere. Even when they began to write in Italian, which they did somewhere about 1240, it continued to be a literature of imitation until Dante's original genius arose. But his love was so com-

pletely the sentiment of the time that he never expresses regret for the marriage of Beatrice, though nothing could equal his agitation whenever she spoke to him. After her death he could not write for months. When the violence of his grief was a little assuaged he wrote verses to her memory. Thinking these were not worthy of her, he wrote a letter in Latin, and in the simplicity of his heart addressed it to all the kings and princes of the earth, and described the loss sustained in Florence and in the whole world by the death of Beatrice. For the opening paragraph of his letter he takes the words of Jeremiah, "quomodo sedet sola civitas plena populo." In the 'Divina Commedia,' the great work of his life, he declares it is composed to do honour to her memory by saying things that had never been said before —and well did he keep his word.

Italy soon became the refuge of all that was to remain of the Provençal civilization. The mental activity that had created poetry and chivalry in the eleventh and twelfth centuries was so far from being arrested that it attempted, in the thirteenth century, an achievement which was not perfected for another two hundred years, viz., the establishment of religious liberty. The great prosperity that Provence had enjoyed for more than three genera-

tions under the Counts of Toulouse was the cause of its ruin. The pope preached a crusade against what has since been so well known as the heresy of the Albigeois. He offered the same plenary indulgence to all who should join it as had been obtained by going to the Holy Land. The country being rich and much nearer, all who wished for plunder as well as indulgences rushed to the attack. The Provençaux defended themselves, and most of the native Catholics wished to protect the heretics. But year after year brought fresh hordes of adventurers. The sentence of excommunication, which offered the vast domains of the Count of Toulouse to the conquerors, drew the great barons from the north, as well as a host of common ruffians, to share in the spoil. This war began in 1209. Count Raymond, whose refusal to persecute his subjects for their religious opinions caused his destruction, died in 1222, despoiled of all his dominions; but the persecution continued till 1244, when the last stronghold of the Albigeois, Mont Ségur, was taken. Long before this, however, the country was ruined, and more than half the population—especially of the higher classes, of whom a large portion had embraced the new doctrine—had been destroyed. The latter had literally been all burnt alive. The troubadours had fled before 1202

to Italy, and poetry had totally vanished. Those pleasant castles were deserted where lords and gay troubadours had assembled, and had listened to poetry and music and cheerful conversation—the first example the world had seen of the social union of talent and rank effected by the tact of women.

Whatever were the doctrines of the Albigeois, it is clear that they were martyrs to conscience, for they died rather than recant. But there is one fact attending this movement which deserves very special notice, because we see no other like it during the long series of heresies that followed. Those who did not adopt the new faith refused to persecute those who did. Even the bishops and the clergy refused. The Benedictine monks, who wrote the history of these events, declare that Count Raymond, who fought so bravely for the liberty of his subjects, was no heretic himself. It was for this reason that the pope sent Dominican friars as emissaries under a new name to coerce every man into an avowal of his faith. And what was this name—a name which to the present day creates a shudder all over Europe? The Holy Inquisition! Yes, alas! it was first established in Toulouse; and the only genuine records of the Albigeois doctrines are those still contained in the registers of the Inquisition of Toulouse.

A very large proportion of the ladies of the feudal caste had been converted to the new doctrines, and their trials and examinations are recorded in these documents. The poetical and exalted sentiments of their youth had prepared them for still higher aspirations, and they died martyrs to their faith. All passed away like a dream; and so romantic a history would never be believed if the poetry in which it was embalmed had not survived. To the son of Count Raymond VI. a portion of the great family fief was restored, on condition that his only daughter and heiress, Beatrice, should be affianced to the brother of the King of France: thus the largest feudal possession in France merged in the crown by the end of the thirteenth century.

Those who love to wander among ruins and to dream of the past will find in Languedoc the old town of Carcassonne, with all its strong towers, just as it existed in 1212, after its inhabitants had been burnt alive and its lord murdered. It is almost a unique monument of the architecture of the time. They will find the ruins of the castle of Minerva, whose lady was a convert. She had been sung by the troubadours. She defended her castle valiantly, and, refusing to recant, perished in the flames. They will find the ruins of Mont Ségur in a beautiful part

of the lower Pyrenees. It was the last refuge of the heretics, and two hundred of them were burnt on one pile when it was taken. They may see at Toulouse the vaulted entrance to the first palace of the Inquisition, the ceiling painted blue in fresco and studded wit gold stars, even now not quite effaced. The traveller will find, if he talks to the peasants in *patois*, that tradition has confounded the extermination of the Albigeois with the persecutions of the Protestants in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But though the peasants are totally ignorant of history, a strong feeling still exists, handed down from father to son, that the north of France has been their destroyer. If they want to praise any one for generosity and justice, they say he is like Count Raymond, and if they want to express the genuineness of a gold coin, it is a Raymondin. It seems as if a dreamy recollection of their long-lost national independence still lingered. I have thought it necessary to say something of the Provençal extermination in order to vindicate the claim of this people to have been the earliest in Europe amongst whom religious liberty found public support; to show that their civilization led them to other objects besides sentiment and poetry; and that they had the right to be considered the originators of the ideas

that took root in Italy and the rest of Europe, although the full expression of these ideas was first given by Dante. Chivalry deviated from its first purpose, but its code of honour is still ours; and if women did not keep the high privilege of inspiring and rewarding all great actions, they remained at least a most important portion of society in France. If by degrees they lost the worship that chivalry had accorded them, they became trusted friends and companions of men. It is this second phase of their social existence that I propose to show in the seventeenth century.

Note.—A poem in Provençal, 'The War of the Albigeois,' with a translation by M. Fauriel, was published in 1837 by the Institut, as one of the documents for the history of France. It is written by a troubadour, an eye-witness of the siege of Toulouse in 1219, and its curiosity as a literary document equals its importance as an historical monument. In the introduction by M. Fauriel he announces the publication of the records of the Inquisition, with the trials of the heretics; his death prevented the accomplishment of the task, and they have never been published.

*** The chief sources of this account have been Monsieur Fauriel's two works, 'Histoire de la Poésie Provençale' and 'Dante et les Origines de la Langue et la Littérature Italiennes,' and the Benedictine history, entitled 'Histoire Générale du Languedoc,' par Dom Vaissette. No assertion has been made that cannot be proved by original documents.

CHAPTER IV.

MADAME DE RAMBOUILLET AND HER DAUGHTER JULIE D'AUGENNE.

I HAVE read in the work of some Eastern traveller, that when a European doctor is called in by a pacha, on whose favourite wife all remedies have been tried in vain, a silken thread is tied round her wrist, and passed through an opening in the wall; the doctor holds the other end, and seeing from the movement of the thread the number of her pulsations, thus judges of her condition. We have scarcely any better means of feeling the pulse of society through the past, or of judging the hearts of the women of the eleventh and twelfth centuries; but from the general character of the age and its poetry we may be sure those hearts beat very high. The ideal they believed in could not always be attained; but no ideal was ever created in vain: the palpitating hearts that failed had striven and suffered. No effort was ever made without a standard being first raised; and conscience is the result of sustained efforts after a lofty

standard. The failures are known to us, not the successes; but we may rationally believe in the latter, for the age believed in them. Chivalry had faith in them, and fought and died for them. No great moral effect was ever produced but by a great and real moral feeling; and here the wonderful change in the position of women is the effect to be accounted for. The number of ladies who died in the flames for the religion of their adoption is recorded in history, and their names are still on the registers of the Inquisition. The mental qualities that led them to erect a higher moral standard were the same that made them seek a purer faith and cling to it even at the stake.

On resuming the consideration of the state of society, after the lapse of four hundred years we are still struck with the depth of the impress made upon it by the age of chivalry. But when we arrive at the second brilliant epoch of women's influence, which began in 1600, we are no longer reduced, by the rarity and indistinctness of individual examples, to conjecture causes from slight indications, or to confine ourselves to vague and general pictures of society.

M. de Rœderer published in 1835, for private circulation, a volume entitled 'A Memoir to be consulted for a History of Polite Society.' Struck

with the historical importance of the social intercourse between the high-born and the intellectual, which began in the seventeenth century, he searched into all the memoirs and letters of the time to show its commencement and gradual advance, and the persons whose influence introduced the usages that have since become general; giving the names, dates, and ages every ten years of the celebrated persons who assembled at the Hôtel Rambouillet, and one or two other favourite resorts. Some years afterwards M. Cousin, in an introduction to a work on the same period, says: "Much is known of the great men, and especially of the great writers of the seventeenth century: the women were not less remarkable, but, with the exception of Madame de Sévigné and Madame de la Fayette, whose writings are classics, they are scarcely known. Yet everywhere in France, at court and in the *salons* of Paris, in the fine old castles of the nobles and in the austere retreats of religion, were women of great intelligence and noble minds." M. Cousin goes on to say that, in the search to which he was urged by curiosity to know more about the women whose names perpetually recur in all the contemporary writers, he has found materials for a whole gallery of portraits. That a man of M. Cousin's calibre and

reputation should have published successively seven volumes, and been occupied ten years in researches into the lives of the ladies of a particular epoch, is a fact as significant as was the creation in the Provençal of the eleventh century of a vocabulary appropriated to their service. And not the less so that M. Cousin did not begin this as a gallant knight in the service of dames, but as a learned historian, who, finding their influence in every transaction of the most brilliant epoch of French history, was forced, for the comprehension of its secret springs, to study those who had so much to do with it. This he has done with the precision of a sceptical critic of history. There is not a trait of character, a sentiment, or an act of their lives that he has not carefully examined and sifted; but these researches soon became a labour of love, and the pleasure of reviving the fair forms that floated in light visions round him has been an ample compensation for the carping of those critics whose zeal for philosophy has led them to condemn his desertion of Plato for the society of the year 1600. As only a spiritualist could understand the ideal of that time, I cannot but exult that one who in early life kept such good company should in his later years have given the benefit of his faith in nobility of mind to

that chosen circle—a circle which could be but a dead letter to historians of diplomatic cunning, or searchers into the impure regions of humanity.

Of all the distinguished ladies of the seventeenth century, the Marquise de Rambouillet deserves the first place, not only as the earliest in order of time, but because she first set on foot that long series of *salons* which for two hundred and fifty years have been a real institution, known only to modern civilization. The general spirit of social intercourse that was afloat; the great improvement in the education of women of the higher classes; and, above all, the taste, not to say the passion, for their society, aided by the general prosperity under Henry IV., might indeed have created *salons;* but it is to Madame de Rambouillet's individual qualities that we owe the moral stamp given to the society she founded, which, in spite of all the inferior imitations that appeared for long after, remains the precedent which has always been unconsciously followed. Reform is in the course of nature, and one of its laws is a tendency to exaggeration in the opposite extreme from the evil that has been overcome. The excessive coarseness, both in talking and writing, that had been universal was succeeded by what was thought at the time overstrained refinement. But we should

not listen to the accusations of some of her contemporaries on this head, if we could hear and know all that Madame de Rambouillet put an end to. Ideas and expressions current in palaces in 1600 would not now be admitted into the porter's lodge; and if any of us would compare the plays acted in London before the court of Charles II. with what would be tolerated now, we should get some notion of what the *Précieuses*, at whose head stood Madame de Rambouillet, effected in France.

She was very young when married to the Marquis de Rambouillet: his father had been a devoted follower and friend of Henry IV., and she was allied to the queen. Their union took place in 1600, and Henry IV. was married the same year to Mary de Medicis. When scarcely twenty-two, having already several children, she was led from premature ill-health and distaste for the dissipations of the court to give up going out to all grand *fêtes* and crowded assemblies. Her father had been ambassador to Rome, and her mother was a Roman lady of the highest rank. Perhaps she owed her taste for art to her early Roman education; certain it is that she herself drew all the plans for rebuilding her father's hôtel about 1610, and that all her life drawing was her favourite occupation. This hotel was in the Rue

St. Thomas du Louvre, close to the Hôtel Longueville: both are now destroyed. It was fitted up according to her own taste, and was full of objects of art and curiosities. Around one room were the portraits of her dearest friends. The drawing-room, then called a *cabinet*, had windows opening from top to bottom, looking into gardens which reached as far as the Tuileries. This large *cabinet* opened into several others, forming a suite of rooms, a fashion she first introduced: baskets of flowers placed about perfumed the air, and from Mademoiselle de Scudéry's raptures at the taste and originality of this device, it was evidently a new fashion also. She was tall, handsome, and dignified, and benevolence and sweetness beamed in her countenance, says Ségrais, and the Grande Mademoiselle * says in her memoirs, "I loved her, I venerated her, I adored her. She was like no one else." The Grande Mademoiselle was born in 1627, and consequently knew her only in middle age; but these were the sentiments the Marquise inspired from her earliest youth. The same respectful tenderness was felt by all, and her house soon became the favourite resort of those whom the customs of the court drove from it; for though Henry IV.'s grace and good-humour exercised

* Mademoiselle de Montpensier, granddaughter of Henry IV.

a' fascination which has extended to posterity, it must be confessed his court was very profligate. Thus the Hôtel Rambouillet was the earliest centre of reform in morals as in manners.

We must picture the young Marquise when about twenty-two as going out but little, keeping especially aloof from the court, and receiving in her agreeable abode all the best of the nobility, whom her birth and connections naturally gathered round her. But she did not inquire into the pedigree of those whose society she preferred; wit and intellect insured a perfect welcome. Even in these her youthful days, Malherbe and Vaugelas—one the most celebrated poet of his time, and both the creators of French style—were constantly at the hôtel. They were men of forty-five or fifty; such men had not till then been courted by the fair, the young, and the noble, as, thanks to her, they have been since; it was her own pleasure in all mental interests that made her seek their society. The most illustrious persons in every line met in her rooms, and each gained by contact with the others. The nobility improved in real civilization by acquiring a taste for letters; the manners of the learned became easy and dignified, not only from their intercourse with those who were polished by a court life, but much

more from the respect that was paid to them by the presiding spirit out of regard for their own intrinsic value. It is to Mademoiselle de Scudéry (of whom more hereafter) that we are indebted for these details about the delightful Marquise, and much more, for which I refer my readers to the volume on French society already mentioned.* Mademoiselle de Scudéry was the playfellow and intimate of the Marquise's eldest daughter, Julie d'Angenne, both born in 1607, and their friendship lasted till death.

The Marquise combined the rare qualities that could alone have founded such a society. The first of these was that independence of mind that led her to prefer merit and intellect to all other distinctions —added to great discrimination in finding them out; not to mention the courage and dignity which inspired her answer to Richelieu when at the height of his power, and which imposed on all those who visited her the extreme politeness that recognized no distinction of rank in her house. The Cardinal knew that men of all parties met there, and that the most desperate conspiracies were continually forming against him. He had been a frequenter of the hôtel in earlier years, and thought himself

* La Société Française au 17ième Siècle d'après Victor Cousin. Mlle. de Scudéry. (Chez Didier, 1858.)

warranted in sending his secretary and spy Boisrobert, to request the Marquise, as an act of friendship, to let him know who spoke against him in her private society; to which demand, I think I see her —with a slight flush mantling in her cheek, but with perfect self-possession—replying that as her friends knew how much she was attached to his Eminence, none could be so impolite as to speak against him in her presence. Boisrobert returned no more.

Eight years previously the French Academy (now the well-known Institut de France) originated in Madame de Rambouillet's *salon* in the following manner. I have said that she was very young, scarcely twenty, when Vaugelas and Malherbe, men of mature years and grave pursuits, were her constant visitors. To these were soon added Racan, Gombault, and by degrees, Balzac, Voiture, and others,—all men of great literary attainments. The French language was still, as may be seen even in the best writings of the time, deficient in polish and precision; indeed, it was often so vague as to leave the meaning quite uncertain. The favourite pursuit of these men, especially in the early days of the seventeenth century, was the improvement of the language. They would discuss a word in all its acceptations before it was admitted, and

the ladies were constantly consulted. Several words were banished from conversation by the Marquise, so completely that I could not venture even to quote them. Towards 1625, after this literary circle had met for several years in the *cabinet* of the Marquise, they agreed to meet once a week for the same object at Conrart's, then one of the frequenters of the hôtel. Perhaps they had been interrupted by some of the more frivolous of the Marquise's friends, who took less interest in their disquisitions. Such was not the case with the great Cardinal, whose inquisitiveness had not diminished as his power increased: Boisrobert contrived to edge himself into this Areopagus of the French tongue. The power-loving, meddling Cardinal could not endure to be excluded from such a quasi-legislative assembly, which had just introduced the word "urbanity" without his participation; and Boisrobert was sent to propose to them the Cardinal's protection, and his offer to erect them into a legal society by letters patent. The nine friends, not having amongst them all the presence of mind of the Marquise, were much disconcerted, as they preferred meeting in intimate communion; and endeavoured to shirk the honour. But it was of no use: the cardinal and Boisrobert were determined; and by degrees they got in

nineteen additional members. After eight years of persevering management the Cardinal became the acknowledged protector of the new Society; letters patent were issued, and it was entitled the French Academy, because its express purpose was to preserve and improve the French language. This result was accomplished in 1633, and many were the additions and privileges that increased its importance subsequently. But little did these men think that of all the grandeurs of those days this institution—after more than two hundred years—would alone survive; that Time would throw over it the venerable mantle it has withheld from all the rest. In 1856, when a minister, as meddling as Richelieu, but without his talents, attempted to compromise its independence, the most important members privately agreed, that if such an attempt were to succeed, they would all deposit their medals, give up their honours and their meetings, and leave their palace of intellect an empty shell: thus showing to Europe that mind at least could still assert its dignity.

Besides her taste for intellect and her dignity, the Marquise had other effective qualities for amalgamating the various elements of society, and improving its tone. At a time when party-spirit was at its height she kept aloof from all its violence, and

saw her friends on both sides. She was eminently virtuous as well as reasonable, and full of affection for a husband whose behaviour to her was always that of a lover: her simple and undeviating conduct at a time when sentiment and gallantry were habitual made her an exceptional person. No unruly passion or vanity disturbed her life or even her *salon;* receiving every one with kindness, incapable of caprice, she was always the same. To all this were added great natural cleverness, and extensive cultivation, which included a thorough acquaintance with Spanish and Italian authors, then the favourite literature; to say nothing of those moral qualities which so peculiarly set off her mental ones—her modesty, her generosity, the constancy of her friendships, and, to crown all, the absence of vanity;—which last must have been complete, for we have only a few letters of her writing, and not one portrait is known to exist. The only certain record M. de Rœderer has been able to find of her conversation is contained in three letters of Balzac, addressed to her, which show us in what subjects she took particular interest, and how well she deserved to be the centre of the most intellectual men of her time. These letters he entitled "discourses," because they were the continuation, he says, of conversations which had

occurred at the hôtel: they are remarkably eloquent, and are free from his usual affectations. One is the picture of a Roman citizen in the days of the Republic, such as the national mind looked to and tried to imitate: it is thought to have been the origin of Montesquieu's *Grandeur et Décadence.* Another is on glory; and the third is an answer to a question of the Marquise's, as to the home life and conversation of the Romans, which, though he consulted all the authorities that were accessible to him, does not seem to us very conclusive: he offers no proofs, but only declares the Romans *must* have been delightful conversers because they were full of politeness and *urbanity:* this word he uses for the first time, and it was adopted by the Academy.

Racan, a dramatic author of some reputation, fell desperately in love with the Marquise, and wrote a play, in which he describes his passion for Arthenice (the anagram of her name, Catherine). This description he suppressed, because, he says, he would not give her the amusement of hearing his unhappy love described; but, he adds: "I wish I could make her memory as everlasting as my love." This is entirely a reminiscence of the manners of chivalry; and many such recur in the first half of the seventeenth century. The most correct ladies might be

surrounded by lovers; and, as in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, their sole duty was to inspire them with noble thoughts and actions. In this second epoch of female power we see as distinctly as in the first, that these lovers had no right to ask more than that society should be made agreeable to them all, and the exercise of their mental faculties encouraged; and such was the pleasure of conversation that jealousies and piques seem to have been much softened by the pleasure of meeting and discoursing as the golden hours flew on. Ever since the days of chivalry, all *fêtes*, shows, and spectacles had been given in honour of ladies; in fact, public amusements were thought impossible without them. At the Hôtel Rambouillet conversation was itself the all-sufficient amusement;—we hear of neither cards nor music,—for when the habit of changing all thoughts and sentiments into words has become natural and easy, it offers so great a variety in itself that society needs no other.

We are scarcely aware now in England how seldom we practise that form of talk which alone can be called conversation, in which what we really think is brought out, and which flows the quicker from the pleasure of seeing it excite thoughts in others—conversation to which both reason and fancy

pay their tribute, and in which even the man of profound sensibility, which is the least communicative of our faculties, may betray by a few words those original impressions to which he alone is susceptible, but which he cannot always express. That it was better known in London in the last century is evident from Johnson's conversations: such a book as Boswell's could scarcely now be written. The most abstract thoughts may be made tangible by lively imagery,—the most complicated subjects may be simplified by the learned to obtain the approbation of an attentive listener, and even the driest may be made interesting under the stimulating influence of that craving for sympathy so natural to human beings who have once tasted its delights. Man is a social being, and his capacity for speech dwindles away if he be much alone. Conversation is the mingling of mind with mind, and is the most complete exercise of the social faculty; but the general barter of commonplaces we choose to call conversation is as far removed from its reality as the signs of Caspar Hauser were from the talking of ordinary men.

We have seen that women had become a most important portion of society from the days of chivalry; but, as cultivation increased, their part in it altered. From the records of the *Cours d'Amour* we may con-

jecture that conversation in its early days, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, turned chiefly on poetry and the various shades of sentiment. Dante says (I think in the Vita Nuova), that meeting with some ladies, he conversed with them about Beatrice; and he addresses them in a sonnet as ladies who understand discourses on matters of love. Somewhere about 1610 or 1615—by which time it may be supposed Madame de Rambouillet had brought around her the elements of the society that still bears her name—refined sentiment was a favourite topic, in contrast with the conversation of the court, where the delicate gallantry of the age had been nearly extinguished by the years of profligacy that had followed the deaths of Louis XII. and Anne of Britany. There is mention somewhere about 1615 that Armand Duplessis, the future Cardinal Richelieu, had maintained a thesis on love with great success in the refined company of the hôtel; he was then twenty-nine, and a very fine gentleman. The invention of such subtle disquisitions has been attributed to the Marquise—a great mistake, as the immense popularity of the *Astrea*, which appeared in 1610, shows. This was a pastoral by the Marquis d'Urfé, containing the history of his love for a celebrated beauty, Diane de Chateaumorand, whom he calls Astrea, naming himself

Celadon. He declares that in these different scenes his design is to show all the various effects of virtuous affection (*l'amitié honnête*). We might find it rather tough reading now; but as an historical monument nothing can be more valuable, for it contains the revival of all the notions of the eleventh century on love, adopting, however, our modern ideal of concluding by marriage. The lovers in the Astrea are all free; their sentiments are as high-flown, and the ladies are as proud and severe, as in the days when no such conclusion was possible, and when pride was indispensable to their sovereignty. There is observable here a transition from the ideas of the eleventh century to our modern novel. In the days of Queen Elizabeth something like the same revival of chivalrous gallantry occurred, modified also by modern customs and ideas. Henry IV., to whom the 'Astrea' was dedicated, was one of its greatest admirers, and of course so was the court:—as it was all about *l'amitié honnête*, nothing but the incomparable power of fashion could have made them admire such fine-spun sentiments. It is impossible to suppose that this fashion could have arisen from the influence of the Hôtel Rambouillet, which in 1610 was only just rebuilt and beginning to open to society. The revival resulted in fact from the general feeling of the time: the influ-

ence of the Marquise would have been in a more serious direction, to judge from her grave conversations with Balzac. The Marquis d'Urfé's pastoral being his own past history, is another proof of the fashion not having been first set by the Hôtel Rambouillet; nor do we learn that he was among its frequenters.

With all her virtue and wisdom Madame de Rambouillet was remarkably cheerful and fond of amusement, and continued to be so to a late period. In no other way could we explain the animated life of the hotel, the droll inventions of Voiture, and all the wit, imagination, and humour lavishly spent in diversions of all sorts. There were frequent parties in the country, walks in the woods, where ladies, concealed in trees, came out dressed as wood-nymphs to compliment the company in verses written for the purpose by some of the young gallants; music equally concealed, would burst out unexpectedly; sometimes an elegant banquet seemed to rise from the ground. These devices were always accompanied by some intellectual pleasantry, such as letters in rhyme, full of droll allusions, which were supposed to be found by accident. This perpetual animation made the hôtel the delight of all who enjoyed refined and elegant amusements; stiffness and ceremony were entirely banished, and everything flowed

easily and merrily along. Such was this society, and, as it was the first of its kind, so it was quite spontaneous, having no pretension to conform to any given type or model. Whoever had animal spirits and could introduce a new invention was joyfully received in a charming abode where wealth and luxury were always subordinate to taste.

Madame de Rambouillet's premature ill health might have been a drawback to her lasting influence by abridging the time that was necessary to establish a complete empire, had not her eldest daughter been peculiarly gifted for carrying it on. Madame de Rambouillet's name has been deservedly given to the society she founded; Julie will remain an accomplished specimen of it. The praises of her contemporaries may appear to us excessive, for Julie had the good fortune to be in perfect harmony with her time. Petted by all that was illustrious and agreeable, surrounded by admiration from her cradle, of a lively and joyous disposition, she delighted in pleasing everybody; she had innumerable lovers, and yet she was never accused of coquetry; both men and women were equally charmed by her, and she exemplified the maxim of the Marquise de Sablé, that women being the ornaments of the world, it is right they should inspire the deepest devotion;

but that their esteem and friendship are a sufficient return. By the time Julie was grown up, these opinions, which under Henry IV. were only beginning to be the fashion and were laughed at by his court, became fully established. M. Cousin attributes this change to the example of Louis XIII.: as such maxims were more or less popular in Spain and England it is probable that the general mind tended that way, and that both Queen Elizabeth and Louis XIII. helped it on by adopting and assimilating from the spirit of their time what best suited their own characters. It is impossible not to recognize in every book of this age the ideas of the twelfth century; but the Provençal poetry, which leaves us no doubt as to their origin, was not even suspected to exist in the seventeenth century. The exactness of the resemblance may be explained either by the natural impulse of the nation where both originated —the same effect recurring whenever the ebb and flow of the moral feeling was in accordance with them—or by their never having been totally effaced from the inner recesses of the national character. However that may be, no lady ever conformed more completely to the revived opinions of chivalry than Julie d'Angenne, and her plain unvarnished history is the best illustration of it.

About 1631 the plague broke out in Paris, and for a time all were seized with terror, and every house was completely sequestered. Madame de Rambouillet's youngest boy, about seven years old, caught it. The mother naturally nursed her child, and Julie shut herself up with her mother and brother till he died. M. de Montausier, then a young officer of twenty-one, heard of this, and was so struck with Julie's behaviour, which contrasted with the general prostration, that he obtained an introduction to the house as soon as he could, and as M. de Rœderer says, fell in love with her from previous admiration. M. Cousin tells us that his elder brother had been refused by Julie, and that he had said, when he left Paris to join the army, "Now I shall die, and my brother will obtain Julie;" but this was not so easy; for Julie had the portrait of Gustavus Adolphus in her room, and whenever an admirer (*un mourant* they were then called) proposed to her, she answered, laughingly, that she never would marry unless that greatest hero of the age proposed to her. She was then twenty-four, M. de Montausier was three years younger. It is universally agreed that he was the original of Molière's Alceste; showing the same noble character and exaggerated sincerity, which Mademoiselle de

Scudéry declares he carried so far that nothing could have made him pay a compliment, even to his mistress, that he did not believe to be true. But he was so much in love with Julie that his passion was the highest of all compliments, lasting, as it did, during repeated absences with the army, where his brilliant valour brought him into fashion. He was taken prisoner, and on his release appointed governor to a distant province; but his love never varied, and at each return he pressed his suit. This lasted thirteen years; his passion stimulated him to efforts totally opposed to his character, for this austere, unbending man, who told disagreeable truths to Louis XIV., persuaded every member of Julie's family, and then her friends, to plead his cause; these failing, he induced Cardinal Richelieu, and then Mazarin, to speak for him. He persuaded all the poets of the time to write in his favour; he wrote poetry himself (not very good); every art of adoration, public and private, was tried, and one still remains, a monument of the gallantry of those days—the famous 'Guirlande de Julie.' This is a folio, magnificently bound, and inscribed to her, with a flower painted in miniature on each leaf by the first artists of the day. There are twenty-nine of these leaves and flowers, and under each of them is a madrigal, composed by one of the wits or poets who frequented the Hôtel

de Rambouillet; each flower is a theme for a compliment. The work was executed by a noted calligrapher named Jarry.

It is pleasant to know that this monument of lost manners, after going through various hands during the revolution, is now in the possession of a descendant of the family. It was presented to Julie in 1641, nine years after M. de Montausier first saw her. In 1644, returning again to Paris, he resolved to try his chance once more: he was a Protestant, but, in order to interest the queen-mother, he turned Catholic; she took his cause in hand, and Julie at length consented to please her mother—for it cannot be supposed that his Catholicism could have had much effect on a lady who was such a devoted admirer of Gustavus Adolphus. In fact, at that time Catholics and Protestants lived together in great harmony; there was no persecution, and it was not till later that the seventeenth century lost its cheerful aspect. The Marquis de Montausier was subsequently created a duke, and named governor to the Dauphin. M. Cousin thinks it a pity Julie should have left the position for which she seemed so completely fitted, and holds that the continuing such a society as that of the Hôtel Rambouillet was a vocation far superior to that of a great lady at court. She did not leave her

mother till 1647, and then it was to go with her husband to his government at Angoulême. The Fronde began in 1648; civil war in the midst of Paris, dividing the nobility into two camps, put an end to society for four years. Not long after this Madame de Rambouillet lost her husband, and then her son, and was bowed down by these afflictions; we may therefore fairly consider, that after 1647, the spirit and gaiety of her circle were quenched. She survived however till 1665; and whoever was distinguished among the new generation was presented to her. Madame de Sévigné, Madame de la Fayette, the Grande Mademoiselle, and many others less known, but scarcely less worthy, had all been frequenters of the Hôtel Rambouillet in their youth; their earliest opinions and admirations had been formed there, and all their writings bear the stamp of its influence. Madame de Rambouillet however had done her work, and such effects are never repeated. She had reformed the whole tone of society; there was a real civilizing spirit of her own in all she did. The *Institut* was due to her. She founded *salons*, and she first gave to men of letters the place in society that they have occupied in France ever since. Europe is still only learning to imitate this her greatest achievement.

CHAPTER V.

MADEMOISELLE DE SCUDÉRY.

WHO has not heard of the 'Grand Cyrus?' But until M. Cousin's researches how little did we think that no learned history, no dry chronicle, or secret memoir, contains so much accurate information as this work! It is in ten thick volumes, was devoured by the most polite society in the world, nay, by the inventors of polite society; it was the subject of every conversation: Madame de Sévigné and Madame de la Fayette delighted in it; Leibnitz requested the honour of corresponding with its author;—yet now these volumes are consigned to dust and oblivion, or mentioned with a sneer by people who never saw them. It never seems to have occurred to these depreciators that the admiration of so many distinguished persons, and of a whole generation, must have been founded on something better than caprice; and, if so, why are these books forgotten? One cause alone will suffice to explain the reason. They were then understood by

all who read them; now they are quite unintelligible. For they were an exact picture—under Greek, Persian, and Armenian names—of all the most important persons on the world's stage under Louis XIII. and the regency of Anne of Austria; I might say under Richelieu and Mazarin. This was the most brilliant period of the French monarchy, when Condé gained great battles at the age of twenty-two, when society was in its most active state, and individuals had not yet lost those strongly-marked characters which the two great cardinals devoted their genius to efface. It would be incredible, if we had not seen the same rapid oblivion in our own time, that Boileau, not more than thirty-five years after the 'Grand Cyrus' appeared, should have been ignorant of the meaning of the work. He finds fault with Mademoiselle de Scudéry, not for choosing a subject in such far-distant regions of history, but for her manner of treating it. Instead, he says, of representing Cyrus as a great king, foretold by prophets in the Bible, or of studying him in Herodotus, and of showing him as the greatest of conquerors, she makes him a die-away Celadon, who thinks of nothing but his passion for Mandane. It never seems to have occurred to this respectable critic that our romance writer might care nothing

about the real Cyrus, and luckily never thought of diluting the brief and solemn sentences of the Bible or the simple narration of Herodotus into volumes of her own modern sentiments.

She was a devoted friend and admirer of the Condé family, and when Madame de Longueville was imprisoned and in disgrace with the court party, the noble creature dedicated her book to her, lost her pension, and had to write for her bread. But all the great people at the Hôtel Rambouillet, and Condé himself, and the Grande Mademoiselle, as proud as Lucifer, honoured her and delighted in her books and her society. And why did they so admire her? Because instead of screwing herself up to try and imagine what the real old Cyrus thought or said, instead of making an incongruous monster with an ancient Nineveh stone face and a modern mind and conversation, instead of endeavouring to show us what she had never known or seen, she delighted herself and her contemporaries with minutely describing what she knew perfectly well, the grand Condé under the name of Cyrus, Madame de Longueville as Mandane, and all those who acted a great part around them. She gives us real and living portraits both of their minds and persons; a little embellished, because she was fond of them, and

because she was of an enthusiastic nature; and after making us as well acquainted with them all as if we had spent a week in the same house, she gives us their long conversations—so curious because so different from our own. But they were those of her time; she invented nothing. When Boileau is so indignant at her making the grand Cyrus talk the most delicate sentiment to Mandane, he should have vented his ire on the grand Condé, who, as the chivalrous lover of Mademoiselle du Vigean, was exactly what Cyrus is described to be. In the same way does Corneille imitate the tone of the ladies of the Fronde, when he makes his heroines order their lovers to kill their enemies. But besides giving us all the remarkable people of her time, living and speaking, with nothing absurd but their fine names—which however so greatly delighted her contemporaries that they continued to be called by them amongst their friends—besides all their faithful portraits, M. Cousin tells us, that after comparing the descriptions of the battles in the 'Cyrus' with private letters, memoirs, and official documents, he finds that the most complete and accurate accounts of the two greatest battles won by Condé are in the 'Grand Cyrus,' and that certain details never before understood are there so well explained that he thinks Condé must either

have related them to Mademoiselle de Scudéry or have written them himself. All this was well known at the time, and the eagerness was intense for each fresh volume, in which so many hoped to see themselves or their friends. Nothing would show better the importance of Mademoiselle de Scudéry's novels than the fact of the greatest captain in France helping her to describe his battles. But when Louis XIV. reigned, and Boileau wrote panegyrics on him, the victories of Condé, the rebellious spirit of the Fronde, the successful reign of Louis XIII., were all forgotten by good courtiers; and as unhappily the great monarch pensioned his poets, those times were left in the shade in order that a brighter light might fall on himself.

It was known that a key, perhaps several, existed, giving the real names in 'Cyrus.' M. Cousin has found one which, aided by his minute acquaintance with the time, has made his explanations wonderfully clear. The long conversations were of her own composing, not taken down verbatim from those she heard or took part in. Still, as they were such as constantly took place at that time, M. Cousin says he "owns his weakness as to these conversations;" he "loves them because there is in them great refinement and a fund of delicate observation, always

well expressed, especially on the subject of the female heart, but also on society, rank, virtue, and character." He "loves them, for they give the happiest representations of the conversations of those days as they really flowed on in the best company, both of the *noblesse* and of the higher *bourgeoisie*." He "loves them, in short, because they are the living picture of that passion for conversation, now extinct along with so many other noble passions, which once was the charm of French society, and held so large a place for so many years in French civilization. It must be owned that the adventures are long and tedious. The lady's talent was not inventive; she excelled in reproducing what she saw and knew; and the 'Grand Cyrus,' being the picture of the first actors in the drama of the time, and giving the conversations she heard in the high-toned society she frequented, is more true than most memoirs." As there is more freedom in speaking under a mask, so feigned names permit the truth to be more boldly spoken; besides which, autobiographers have a tendency to put themselves in becoming attitudes for the benefit of posterity.

According to the key, most of the personages in 'Cyrus' were the frequenters of the Hôtel Rambouillet; but towards 1652, after the Fronde and

Julie's final departure, Mademoiselle de Scudéry began those Saturday evenings which became so noted in the memoirs of the time and the history of society. It was natural that the literary element should predominate at Mademoiselle de Scudéry's as the aristocratic did at Madame de Rambouillet's, at least numerically. Not that the friendship of her aristocratic friends was in the least withdrawn from their favourite, who, besides, was of noble birth; but as time went on they grew old and disappeared; younger and more literary men naturally assembled round the fashionable romance writer. She had in her immediate neighbourhood (Rue de Beauce in the Marais) a few intimates among the ladies who were more remarkable for their wit than their rank. Paris was even then beginning to extend. It was at this time that she wrote 'Clélie.' In the 'Grand Cyrus' are represented the personages she had known in her youth at Madame de Rambouillet's; in 'Clélie,' those of her own circle are shown. One great mistake she made in dressing the latter in a Roman costume. Too much is known of Brutus and such personages to make them talk the language of modern gallantry without a tinge of ridicule. The Persian names recall nothing but dim images. Although Corneille's Romans are moderns, breathing

chivalrous honour instead of Roman antiquity, the pictures are so fine that we forget their inaccuracy; but Mademoiselle de Scudéry's *pays de tendre*, which at first was only a joke on her part, did infinite harm. Besides this, the real characters introduced had not the same interest as those of her first work, though there are a few portraits of literary men which have an historical value. But authors are to be classed according to their best efforts, for it is only the best that will live; and Mademoiselle de Scudéry must be judged by the 'Grand Cyrus.' I will therefore leave her other works, and proceed at once to M. Cousin's account of her society.

"As at first nothing was thought of but harmless amusement, these assemblies were for a long time free from pedantry. The habitual conversation was easy and airy, tending to pleasantry; the women, like those of the Hôtel Rambouillet, were correct without prudery or primness; the men were gallant and attentive, and surrounded them with the graceful homage which distinguished the best manners of the time. A slight shade of tenderness was allowed, but passion was entirely forbidden. The greatest stretch of gallantry was a certain semblance of Platonic love, and even this introduced now and then some slight jealousies."

To a foundation of real friendship was added that preoccupation, that pleasure in pleasing, which exists in the society of men and women of refined tastes and habits. There was more respectful submission to ladies—who carried their heads immeasurably higher than in our degenerate days, when cigars, pipes, beer, and wine have replaced them in other countries, and even in France are making gradual conquests, which will be more profitable to the revenue than to civilization.

Mademoiselle de Scudéry gives her portrait in the 'Grand Cyrus' under the name of Sappho; but it is the portrait only of her mind. She was in person very plain, and had a dark skin—a great defect in those triumphant days of *blondes*. Yet to arrive as near as possible to Sappho's heart was the object of all who frequented her. She had early declared her determination never to marry, giving her love of independence as a reason; and as her brother George had tyrannized over her to the degree of keeping her under lock and key until she had written a certain number of pages, it is not difficult to account for this love of liberty, especially as she was surrounded by the most tender and respectful homage. Conrart, the perpetual secretary of the Academy, had long hoped to be the first object of her regard,

but Pélisson alone succeeded, and he only in course of time. It is murmured that, with all her delicate caution, Mademoiselle de Scudéry did not quite succeed in maintaining perfect harmony between these two, and that love, even Platonic, gave umbrage to friendship. Conrart, who had so long loved her, grew much cooler—so we learn from Ménage, to whom she told it. In 1653, however, peace reigned in the Rue de Beauce, and Conrart, as secretary of the Academy, held the first place in her society. Everything was talked of there, from state affairs to the last fashions, on one condition—that the gallant tone of which the Hôtel Rambouillet was the model should never be dropped. It would be as difficult to define this tone as it is to define its modern equivalent—the manners of a perfect gentleman; but extreme politeness and attention to women was one of its most important elements: and we shall see later, even when women were beginning to descend in the scale, that Louis XIV., the most stately of monarchs, walked beside Madame de Maintenon's sedan-chair, hat in hand, for four hours to show her the review and explain its movements. She was then his wife, though privately married, and between fifty and sixty. On the subject of this friendship between Pélisson and Mademoiselle de Scudéry I

translate M. Cousin, only regretting all I leave out.

Pélisson became the secretary of Fouquet, and defended him in 1661; for which he spent nearly five years in the Bastille. His name is best known from the story of the large spider he had tamed and made his companion during these years of misery—his only companion, which the wretch of a jailer trod upon. Pélisson was born in 1624 at Beziers. He had already distinguished himself by a work on jurisprudence, when, at nineteen, he caught the small-pox, and was so disfigured that his friends did not know him. He concealed himself at first in profound solitude, but after a time came to Paris and became intimate with Conrart, at whose suggestion he wrote a history of the Academy in 1659, which is still valuable. He met Mademoiselle de Scudéry at Conrart's, for the gallant *secrétaire perpétuel* delighted in entertaining the ladies at his country house. Pélisson was then twenty-nine; she was sixteen years older. He at once felt esteem and affection for her; and these sentiments ripened into one of those deep and rare friendships, so very near to love, which Mademoiselle de Scudéry has so well described in the 'Grand Cyrus.' Tallemant sneers at him, saying, "That fellow is always having

some love or other *à la Platonique.*" "It was easy for Tallemant to talk," says M. Cousin; "he was rich, good-looking, and totally without scruples; but really what can a man do, young and disfigured, too diffident to enter on a suit that may be rejected, and unable to stifle the invincible yearnings of his heart and his youth although he has not a handsome face? Is he to be condemned never to love, never to be beloved? Why should he not cherish an affection pure yet tender, having the charms of friendship and of love? No doubt the truest manner of satisfying all the best instincts God has given to us is by marriage—an institution at once natural and divine; but when marriage is impossible—and it certainly is so sometimes—why deny to noble hearts either of men or women an affection so needful, the right of all human beings, and most honourable when placed under the restraints of reason and honour? The lucky gainers of the prizes of this world's lottery, fine ladies and gentlemen, may laugh if they please, but we honour these tender friendships; we know their perils and also their incomparable charm. They are better a thousand times than commonplace love, and only inferior to the real union of minds sanctified by marriage. Far from joining in a laugh at Pélisson and Mademoiselle

de Scudéry, we esteem them the more for having loved tenderly and honestly. All agree as to the perfection of this intimacy. It was at once public and secret; all believed in its purity, and they enjoyed in peace their mutual affection. Is it not something touching to see these two creatures, so distinguished for their mind and talents, finding the source of their felicity in the purity and certainty of this friendship?"

Thus writes M. Cousin; and it may comfort those who regret his desertion of Plato to reflect that more scholars might be found to translate Platonic Greek than to understand and paint with such grace and delicacy Platonic love—Plato translated into modern reality. Even the coarse Tallemant, the slanderer, respects the friendship of Mademoiselle de Scudéry and Pélisson, and believes in its purity. During the five years spent in the Bastille, all Mademoiselle de Scudéry's ingenuity, all her imagination, were employed in transmitting to her friend a few occasional words of comfort or a piece of useful information. She was continually inventing new channels of communication, and contrived to keep up a constant correspondence with him. At times, when he was ready to fall into despair, a few lines would reach him and bring him comfort. He was *au secret*, and deprived

of writing materials; but he wrote with lead torn from his casement on the fly-leaves of his books his admirable and eloquent memoir in defence of Fouquet, and a poem in honour of Mademoiselle de Scudéry. When he was at length liberated, his fortunes improved. The friendship lasted till his death, in 1693. The lady was then eighty-six, and at that advanced age she wrote anonymously a simple and touching memoir of him in the 'Mercure.' In its beginning, this friendship had its crosses. Conrart was jealous, and her brother hated Pélisson because he had not praised him sufficiently in his memoirs of the Academy.

In the 'Grand Cyrus' there is the following passage, evidently drawn from reality, in which the two actors speak under the names of Sappho and Phaon. We must suppose the friends to have been thwarted:—"These two persons, who when they began this explanation scarcely knew what to say, who had in their hearts a thousand sentiments they believed they never could utter to each other, at last said everything; and the exchange of their thoughts was so sincere that all those which had so long been in Sappho's mind passed into Phaon's; and all those of Phaon's came into Sappho's. They even agreed on the conditions of their love: he

solemnly promised he never would wish for anything but the possession of her heart, and she promised him that no one but himself should ever be admitted into hers. They then told each other every particular of their lives; and from that time there was such perfect union between them that nothing was ever seen equal to it. Phaon's love increased with his happiness, and Sappho's affection became more tender from the knowledge of the great love he had for her. No hearts ever were so united, and never did love join so much purity to so much ardour. They told all their thoughts to each other; they even understood them without words; they saw in each other's eyes their whole hearts, and sentiments so tender, that the more they knew each other the more entire was their love. Peace was not, however, so profoundly established as to let their affection grow dull or languid; for although they loved each other as much as it is possible to love, they complained each in turn that it was not enough." This passage may suffice to explain M. Cousin's remark respecting Mademoiselle de Scudéry—viz., that she was the first writer of the intimate romance which substitutes the inward agitation—the drama going on in the mind—for the exterior movement of the romances of chivalry. Madame de la Fayette's 'Princesse de

Clèves' is still the most perfect specimen that exists of this style; for though inward life has been the favourite theme of most modern French lady-writers, they have said too much; they have torn away all veils from the human mind, and analyzed and dissected it till its mysterious charm has been destroyed. Madame de la Fayette has shown ineffable grace in leaving just enough to the imagination of the reader.

It may already have been observed that at this period social relations were the most important business of life; that being agreeable or disagreeable to others both in mind and person was "to be or not to be;" that all the shades of friendship, from the deep Platonic affection we have just seen to the slight impression one person made on another at first meeting, were the real preoccupations of existence; that all outward conditions were subordinate to the pleasure given by the communion of one human being with another. The smallest grace of mind or manner was observed and was of importance; there was an intense epicurism in companionship; it was both the first occupation and the greatest pleasure of life. Getting rich, building castles, making discoveries, founding a family—these objects might be followed by a few, but sociability was the universal passion.

Some animals are so gregarious that they die if they are alone. The great degree to which this instinct or sentiment was developed in these persons was the cause of the intense pleasure they found in one another.

It would be too long to give a minute account of all the charms of Pélisson's mind; but one trait I shall quote:—"Friendship and love are differently felt by him and by others; for when he is only a friend, he has almost the ways of a lover; and when he is a lover, there are times when one might believe he felt only friendship; not from coldness, but from the generosity of his mind, which makes him forget his own self and his passion in his zeal for the happiness of his beloved. Thus, for instance, if he had a mistress whom a king was to marry, he would even sacrifice his love, his joy, his very life, to place her on the throne, although he might know he should never see her again from that moment." This trait from a real character given by Mademoiselle de Scudéry is a curious coincidence with the case of Gerard de Roussillon, who gives up his lady that she may marry an emperor. She certainly never saw this Provençal romance; but it was still the love of the eleventh century, and Pélisson was of the country where such sentiments first appeared in poetry.

Pélisson, with his devotion to his friend Fouquet, his five years in the Bastille, his taming the spider, his rare love for Mademoiselle de Scudéry, needed not this resemblance to the most perfect ideal of ancient romance to make him interesting; but as another example of the indelible impression of the eleventh century on the national character, this delineation has an historical interest.

At the Saturday assemblies of Mademoiselle de Scudéry, where at first nothing but gay conversation went on, original poetry and prose came by degrees to be read aloud by their authors; and after a time it was proposed to write down minutes of what was done. Pélisson was the secretary, and some of these minutes still exist among Conrart's papers. One, dated the 20th December, 1653, is called the 'Day of Madrigals.' These innovations might perhaps have tended to destroy the easy and amusing character of the entertainments. Certainly they were imitated to a degree of pedantry in after times. Madrigals were the first compositions that were read aloud to the company: they gave rise to a fund of amusement, bringing forth pleasantries and answers in verse, and for some time nothing but madrigals were in favour. By degrees other compositions were introduced; but Mademoiselle de Scudéry's Satur-

days, whether at home or at her neighbour's, Madame Arragonais, never ceased to bear the gay and playful character of the Hôtel Rambouillet; for their first object was that of friendly intercourse, though, as all were fond of verses and of literature, this taste also was indulged in. What may now appear to us fine-drawn speeches constituted their habitual way of thinking; as they had never been criticised or laughed at they were as natural in their sort of refinements as we are in ours, which would certainly appear affectation to the Greeks of the days of Pericles. It was this unconsciousness of ridicule that prevented that caution which now ruins society, for both the Hôtel Rambouillet and Mademoiselle de Scudéry were far too much admired in their generation for Molière to have attacked them. It was not till this society was at an end, and bad imitations had arisen, that Molière's plays appeared. Madame de Rambouillet went in her old age to the first representation of the 'Précieuses Ridicules,' and laughed heartily. We are not informed why Mademoiselle de Scudéry and her society left her own abode; but after a year or two the Saturday evenings were held at the house of one of the ladies she was the most intimate with in the neighbourhood; and this might have been one of the causes of their downfall. They did

not last in their prime above four years; they were at their best in 1652; but from that time began to deteriorate, and after 1657 we hear little more of them. We may conjecture that the anxiety caused by Pélisson's imprisonment in 1661 must have given them the final blow. Mademoiselle de Scudéry was at the height of her reputation and fashion from 1649 to 1660, and no writer in France was so popular. Yet her assemblies never acquired the importance of those of the Hôtel Rambouillet or of Madame de Sablé, nor of many that succeeded each other through the eighteenth century down to those of Madame Récamier. Several reasons might be alleged for this; but the first of all is the comparatively short time which they lasted. Madame de Rambouillet married in 1600, some say at fourteen. We may consider her society to have begun about 1610, and it went on till 1648 in all its brilliancy. Madame de Sablé continued to receive her friends for thirty years: she was the real successor of Madame de Rambouillet, and some account of her will show how the spirit of society altered as the century advanced.

CHAPTER VI.

MADAME DE SABLÉ.

M. COUSIN has given a whole volume to the Marquise de Sablé: he says the interest and importance she has in his eyes are due to her friendship with all the most illustrious people of her time, from the earlier part of the century to 1678, when she died. She certainly was the real successor to Madame de Rambouillet, and assembled round her, more than any other of the remarkable women of her time, the various elements of the best society, but she also illustrates a new phase in its history and in that of women, and is therefore more important for my purpose than some who individually may be superior to her. Born in 1599 of noble parents, married at fifteen to the Marquis de Sablé, and possessing a very handsome person, she was a favourite at the court of Anne of Austria, and a brilliant guest at the Hôtel Rambouillet. She was surrounded by admirers, but it was at the time when the maxims of the twelfth

century, aided by the example of Louis XIII. and of the Hôtel Rambouillet, had established the reign of the *Précieuses* in all their proud pre-eminence, and she was a *précieuse* of the first water. Though not indifferent to admiration, she adopted all the maxims I have spoken of in my account of Julie d'Angenne, whose intimate friend she was. But it is not the days of her youth or the triumphs of her beauty that I propose to dwell upon. She lost her husband and her son when she was in middle life. The Marquis de Sablé had been a dissipated man, and left her with a reduced fortune: she retired to a small house in the Place Royale, and a few years afterwards to the convent of Port Royal, when she became a Jansenist. It is under these circumstances that she becomes a subject for history, for she is the earliest example of those ladies peculiar to France, who by their social tact alone not only exercised great influence, but more than any others maintained the mixture of all the best elements of society which Madame de Rambouillet had begun. At this time the independent character of the *noblesse* was not yet quite effaced by the astute policy of the two cardinals; and to their former energy was added a brilliant polish, which was increased by the influence of women, but which belonged to the age, and was

the last bright flash emitted by the spirit of chivalry before its extinction. To this was added the novelty of literary cultivation, at first an aristocratic distinction and a new source of pleasure. Perhaps nothing but such a combination could have produced the phenomenon then first seen in the world—of women, neither young, rich, nor handsome, becoming as important and influential, perhaps more so, than in the full sovereignty of their beauty. The same chivalrous imagination that had always been so favourable to them now threw a halo over their intellect and the charms of their conversation, as it had done over their beauty and character in the eleventh century.

We must remember that Madame de Sablé was a woman past fifty—a childless widow, of moderate fortune, and, though clever, without any of the literary reputation of Mademoiselle de Scudéry. But in one of Mazarin's pocket-books lately come to light, a list of names of all the personages of importance who frequented her house is written down, with the following remark, in the writing of his Eminence: "Madame de Longueville is very intimate with Madame de Sablé; they talk freely of everybody. I must get some one into her assemblies to tell me what they say." We saw the same anxiety in Richelieu about Madame de Rambouillet's circle: Cardinal Mazarin

may be trusted to point out the social successor of Madame de Rambouillet, and his notice sufficiently proves the importance attached to what was said in assemblies supposed to meet only for amusement. Madame de Sablé belonged to the court party, but her dearest friends were *Frondeurs;* and when the civil war ceased, she employed her influence in obtaining amnesties and pardons for the vanquished, and softening the animosities of both sides. Madame de Rambouillet had been the first and warmest friend of talent, and had at times obtained from Cardinal Richelieu pensions and assistance for men of letters. Madame de Sablé, always a favourite of Anne of Austria, and on good terms with Cardinal Mazarin, followed the example—helping them by all the means in her power.

The disorderly and disreputable lives of many literary men in England during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have frequently been described, and cannot, I fear, be denied. Poverty alone would scarcely have brought them to such disgrace; debt and sponging-house life seem to have been their normal condition. Nothing of this kind is to be seen among the literary men of France. Many were vain and worldly; they belonged to society, and had its usual faults, to which some added an unusually

large allowance of conceit, with its amiable concomitants of envy, hatred, and malice. But never do we see anything like the lives of which all the English biographies of that time give us such painful pictures, those constantly recurring scenes of literary men being picked up by watchmen, dead drunk, or of their not having a roof to shelter them, not to mention other species of want; the want being often just as pressing where neither drunkenness nor vice could be alleged as the cause. A "Grub-street writer" is an expression which, without implying any misconduct, excites contempt; though why the poverty, so often allied to talent, which constrained its victim to rack his brains on cold nights in a miserable garret to amuse a frivolous public, should excite contempt, I cannot conceive, even if the man did live in Grub Street.

To what did the French literary man owe his exemption from these miseries? To whom should he give thanks that the rich, the ignorant, and the vulgar made no insolent and proverbial jokes upon poor authors living in garrets, Grub-street scribblers, &c.? To the women, who from the earliest days of literature gave them all the succour they could; bringing them into contact with the rich and the great, showing them off with every kind of ingenuity

and tact, so as to make them understood and valued. Yes, even in the twelfth century the ladies of the south welcomed the poet and made the barons and feudal chiefs treat him as their equal. In other countries a noble poet might be admired by high-born dames, and an exception might perhaps occasionally be made in favour of one who was not noble: but where, except in France, do we find it a general rule and custom for women of all ranks to make common cause with the whole talent and genius of the nation? If we examine into the private history of all their celebrated men, we find scarcely one to whom some lady was not a ministering spirit. They helped them with their wit, their influence, and their money. But what is all this?—Dross. They did far more; they helped them with their hearts, listened to their sorrows, admired their genius before the world had become aware of it, advised them, and entered patiently into all their feelings, and soothed their wounded vanities and irritable fancies. What balm has been found in the listening look for the worn and vexed spirit; how has it risen again after repeated disappointment, comforted by encouragements gently and tenderly administered! If the Otways and the Chattertons had possessed one such friend, their country might

not have been disgraced by their fate. Are the life and happiness of the poet, of the man of genius, a trifle? What would human society be without them? Let all who hold a pen think of the kind hearts who by the excitement of social intercourse and sympathy have preserved a whole class from falling into degradation and vice. And even if this consideration cannot prevent a sneer at the slight affectations betrayed by the literary pretensions and silly adulations which followed in later times, such pitiless and strong-minded judges might remember that these are but the natural excesses of admiration for talent—talent now the sole remaining independent power in France. It was this sympathy of women that so early made literary men an important portion of society in France; but in what other country would women have had the power of conferring such importance? Among the anecdotes preserved of the Hôtel Rambouillet is one relating that the grand Condé, being angry at Voiture, one of its greatest favourites, said, "If he was one of us we should not put up with such behaviour." So many stories are preserved of Voiture's vanity and impertinence, that there can be no doubt that he was at times difficult to bear with; but his wit so charmed the Marquise that the grand

Condé, first prince of the blood, was obliged to submit.

When the seventeenth century began, and Madame de Rambouillet mingled the descendants of the feudal chiefs with the new power—the men of letters, the natural consequence of such a combination was that romantic and chivalrous literature of which Mademoiselle de Scudéry and Corneille may be taken as the representatives. Though Corneille's genius was immeasurably above Mademoiselle de Scudéry's, there was a strong affinity between their minds: they had the same love of the grand and noble, the same disregard of the petty; their exaggeration had a simplicity in it, for it was the natural expression of their singular faculty of admiration. It was the ladies of the Hôtel Rambouillet who defended Corneille's 'Cid' enthusiastically against Cardinal Richelieu and numerous enemies; and posterity has confirmed their judgment. He read all his plays at the hôtel before they were acted in public.

But by degrees great changes came over society, both in spirit and in manners. In two points only did it remain the same at Madame de Sablé's that it had been at the Hôtel Rambouillet. Personal merit was still held to be superior to all other dis-

tinctions, and perfect freedom of opinion and speech continued to be the first law, controlled only by good taste and politeness.

Madame de Sablé was not, like Madame de Rambouillet, young, full of spirits, and the first who found out how to enjoy all the intellect of a nation. By the time that Madame de Sablé's circle had reached its perfection, from 1658 to 1660, the age, like herself, had grown staid. Louis XIV. might give *fêtes* to his mistresses; he might pension his poets; but the independent, inventive, turbulent, joyful spirit of youth so rife in the beginning of the century had sobered down. Madame de Sévigné and La Fontaine were the last who retained something of it. They were succeeded by a more reflective spirit, which increased as the century went on, and which developed itself in two different manifestations. The first of these was Jansenism, which had absorbed all the talent that the court had not seduced. Its professors were noble representatives of their time, but they were imbued with its melancholy and dispirited tendency. In the second place, the imagination of which Corneille was the type, and which turned instinctively to what was great, and painted everything larger than life, was succeeded by a talent delighting in the close examination of all the

small aspects of human character, from which could be drawn wise saws and witty maxims. Broad lines were replaced by minute particularities, rendered with all the perfection that art could compass. The successful efforts made at an early period by the choice minds of the age to give precision and polish to the language, had perfected a fine instrument, which was now employed in giving the highest finish to the ugliest details. Thus the maxims of La Rochefoucault were elaborated from the conversations at Madame de Sablé's. But as both she and the distinguished women who were her friends had spent their youth among more genial minds, they recoiled from the discouraging result; and their letters all describe their admiration for the manner, and their dislike for the matter, of this literature: but as they passed away this product of a decrepit and shrivelled age became more popular. However, the great Pascal was among the frequenters at Madame de Sablé's, and was better suited to the minds of the graver portion of her society. Those deep and solemn thoughts, called 'Les Pensées de Pascal,' were for the greater part written down about 1662 in detached sentences; and M. Cousin, who more than any one has a right to judge, is convinced that they *also* were written after conversations with the society

at Madame de Sablé's. It was shortly before this time that she built a small house in the garden of Port Royal; her old and courtly friends all flocked from the most fashionable parts of the town to the end of the Rue St. Jacques, and there met the Arnaulds, Nicole, Donat, Madame de la Fayette, Pascal, and many others. Madame de Longueville was her dearest friend, and through her was brought to know the celebrated Mère Angélique Arnauld: an impassioned friendship was formed between these two ardent spirits; Madame de Longueville became a Jansenist, and thus Madame de Sablé was the indirect cause of the re-establishment of Port Royal. Madame de Sablé's good sense, her moderation, her harmonizing spirit, kept all these various elements of society around her till she died. Many of the brilliant friends of her youth had turned to Jansenism, notwithstanding its severity; doubtless the denial of the human will must tend to weaken its energy and its spirit; but there was a nobleness, a self-forgetfulness in the devotion of Jansenism better suited to the romance of their early times than the orderly dissipation, mixed with Jesuitical devotion, of the court of Louis XIV. There is a coincidence, slight, but curious, between the chivalrous poetry of the twelfth century ending in the flames of the inquisi-

tion, and the romance of the days of Condé ending in the austere tenets of Port Royal.

Madame de Sablé died at Port Royal in 1678, leaving a collection of letters from many of her distinguished friends, containing details to be found nowhere else. Madame de Longueville was with her to the last; and her influence in the history of Port Royal belongs so completely to my subject that I shall now give a short account of her.

CHAPTER VII.

MADAME DE LONGUEVILLE.

To give any account of the society of the seventeenth century, and of the ladies to whom it seemed especially to belong, and not to speak of Madame de Longueville, is impossible. She was the mainspring of the war of the Fronde; yet neither she herself nor the Duchesse de Chevreuse had that lasting influence on society or civilization which several other ladies, far less conspicuous, exercised to the great improvement of their own time and of subsequent generations. The activity of these two ladies not only equalled, but surpassed that of most of the remarkable men in the war; their history is a curious succession of political intrigues, of sieges and battles, of hairbreadth escapes—by sea, in open boats; by land, galloping hundreds of miles across France in disguise. It seems scarcely possible to explain why Madame de Chevreuse displayed so much cleverness to so little purpose; but thanks to the Memoirs of

La Rochefoucault, Madame de Longueville's motives are well known. All her powers were employed in carrying on a civil war to serve the purpose of one who had not even a noble ambition. The motives were not high; the means were wicked, for they tended to the introduction of a foreign army into the country; but the result was worse than all. It increased tenfold the power of Mazarin; for four years of civil war in the heart of France made the nation glad to accept anything for the sake of peace. Madame de Longueville, Madame de Chevreuse, the grande Mademoiselle de Montpensier, and many other ladies of the Fronde, levied troops and organized regiments like any other chiefs, with the additional influence, which youth and beauty, and the gallantry of their age gave them. They are a remarkable illustration of the power of women on the imagination of France in those days, for they gained much more admiration than blame. Still it is probable that the bad use some of them made of this power was unconsciously felt, and was one of the causes of its decrease. The following page from La Rochefoucault's memoirs divulges more than at first meets the eye. "The princess who will act an important part in the sequel of these affairs had every advantage of mind and person to so high

a degree, added to so much fascination, that it seemed as if nature had taken a pleasure in fashioning her into a perfect and finished work; but these fine qualities were dimmed by one spot, never seen before in a princess of so much merit; namely, that far from making her will the law of those who especially adored her, she entered so entirely into their sentiments that she no longer knew what were her own. In those days the Prince de Marsillac (Rochefoucault's own title before his father's death) held a large place in her thoughts, and as he united ambition to love, he inspired her with a taste for public affairs, although she had naturally an aversion to them."

In this page La Rochefoucault gives us the measure both of his mind and character. He does not perceive that to all who read it he will for ever appear as a calculating man, carefully forwarding his own schemes while he is acting the impassioned lover. That the lover himself should look upon this incapacity of using her legitimate governing power over him as a flaw sufficient to obscure all the great qualities of the princess, shows how completely the ideas of the eleventh century as to the high moral power of women must have reigned at this time.

She lost thereby much grace in his eyes, for she appeared to him like a queen demeaning herself. Again, this page shows the complete opposition between the opinions of those days and of our own; we rarely see them so aptly arrayed side by side. For this very flaw, this spot so inexcusable in the eyes of her lover, M. Cousin, who dislikes La Rochefoucault—M. Cousin, the most ardent lover of his country—considers as a palliative, if not an excuse, for all the mischief Madame de Longueville brought on France. Her passion for, and blind submission to her calculating lover, instead of extinguishing, enhances her value in his eyes.

The entire devotion of a young gallant to the mistress of his heart, his submission to all her whims, was a grace to be assumed if not felt. But a woman, subdued and humbled, was not admitted by the general imagination; it was unseemly, unbecoming. Those who had not the pride and dignity of the *Précieuses*, and there were many such; those too who, like the Duchesse de Montbazon, were as unscrupulous as heroines of the nineteenth-century novels, were finished coquettes. They had many lovers, and cared not for any one sufficiently to be governed by him. They swayed their sceptre boldly and triumphantly. In the days of Molière, though

time had a little modified the ideal, we see in Célimène this same witty and powerful coquette; she loses no grace in her lover's eyes by her indifference; she refuses to marry and go into solitude with him, and he leaves her in a huff, but broken-hearted and more in love than ever. The poet himself thinks her quite charming, though not laudable. The fictions of the time do not show one heroine guided and governed by her lover. The Princesse de Clèves, the most perfect picture of deep, silent, and virtuous love, refuses to marry her lover; and one of her reasons is that his passion has been so perfect, and that it might diminish and become inferior to hers —a possibility which she cannot bear even to think of. Madame de Longueville, in her submissive devotion, was not in harmony with the time: she was indeed a traitor to her sex and to all their code of honour. But she at least belonged to her time by the grandeur of her repentance. After overturning France for five years, after seeing La Rochefoucault become the friend of the enemies she had made for his sake, Madame de Longueville at thirty-nine renounced the world and all its vanities, and threw herself into all the most strict observances which the Catholic religion imposes on repentant sinners. She wore an iron belt, and, what was far

more trying to her independent and wilful nature, she gave herself up to the dull duties which she owed to a husband she had never liked, and remained with him till his death. She then retired to the Carmelites, and when introduced by Madame de Sablé to the Mère Angélique, she became a Jansenist. At the time of the persecution of Port Royal, the generosity, the ardour, and the heroism that Madame de Longueville had displayed in the worst of causès were rekindled in a good one. She opened her various houses to the fugitives; she received the persecuted chiefs in the Hôtel Longueville; she worked for them with her natural courage; she even became prudent for their sake; she used all the influence she had with her friends at the court of Louis XIV; she reached, through others, by long and complicated negotiations conducted with consummate art, even to the court of Rome. At last, after nine years of patience and perseverance, she brought about, in 1669, the restoration of Port Royal. "This," M. Cousin says, "is her glory among men;" and it is this achievement that enrolls her among the women who did great things in those days. An anecdote will show how sincere was her repentance. One day, while in her sedan-chair, on her way from the Carmelites to Port Royal, a

stranger approached her chair, requesting a favour, which she told him very politely it was not in her power to grant; upon which, in a loud voice, he broke out into abuse, and reproached her with her past life. Her servants were going to throw themselves on him, but she exclaimed, "Stop, do nothing to him; let him say what he will, I deserve worse." She slept on the bare ground for several years, and these severe penances wearing out her constitution, she died at the age of fifty-nine.

After reposing nearly two hundred years in her grave, she has exercised another influence more valuable even than the restoration of Port Royal. Attracted by her beauty, her high rank, her spirit, and her devotedness, M. Cousin, with a magic wand, as Walter Scott calls his own vivifying power, has conjured her back into life in all her charms; and according to the different creed of our time, the love for La Rochefoucault, which made her forget everything but his interest, excuses in her biographer's eyes all the mischief she did. But his indignation falls upon La Rochefoucault both for this and for his ingratitude; and he has shown how the life of the man accorded and harmonized with his maxims. The author of 'Du Beau, du Bien, et du Vrai,' might not have under-

taken so disagreeable a study had he not been sustained by the contemplation of the figure that charmed his imagination. No book has done more harm to the French mind than La Rochefoucault's. Devoid of every noble and generous impulse, he has deduced from his own poor and egotistic nature a sort of theory, according to which "All virtue is selfishness;" and as a necessary conclusion, if we believe in others we are ourselves dupes. This low standard helped to establish the materialism of the eighteenth century. To account for such an effect in a book of so little imagination, we must remember that its author was gifted with an instrument fine as the sting of a bee. His clear and polished French darts its poison into the mind as the bee darts its poison into the flesh. To M. Cousin's admiration for Madame de Longueville we owe the knowledge we now possess of La Rochefoucault's character, as well as those pictures of the seventeenth century, which will be more and more read as we learn better to understand and value those days of romance and enthusiasm.

CHAPTER VIII.

MADAME DE MAINTENON.

THE time arrived when those ladies who, like stars, had shone so brightly in the beginning of their century were gradually sinking down one after another. Madame de Rambouillet died in 1671; her daughter, Madame de Montausier, in 1673; Madame de Sablé in 1678; Madame de Longueville in 1679. Mademoiselle de Scudéry lived till the latter end of the century; but she was born in 1607, and belonged to their generation. Of their contemporaries many as distinguished as themselves were going or gone. Even the following generation, who had been their disciples, were past middle age, such as Madame de Sévigné, Madame de la Fayette, Madame de la Sablière, &c. &c. The original *salons* had long been closed. Madame de Sablé, though the contemporary of the ladies who had founded them, had not assembled the society which became so celebrated under her name till the earliest *salons* had ceased, and its spirit belonged to the latter part of the

century, which was far different from that of the early times. The taste for conversation, the value for wit and literature had become so general that the resorts of those who were celebrated for them became too numerous to be remarked. However, amongst those quoted by contemporaries was the Hôtel d'Albret. Madame de Caylus says it succeeded to the Hôtel Rambouillet. St. Simon says that, "It was the largest house in Paris, crowded with the best company, both distinguished and select." It was at the Hôtel d'Albret that a young person was first introduced into the world, with whose history I shall close this account of the women of the seventeenth century; for her life is a complete illustration of the position women occupied in France at that time, and of the value their mental powers gave them: she is besides the last of the *Précieuses*, and of those women of the seventeenth century, whose letters will live as literary and historical monuments of the time.

Françoise d'Aubigné, afterwards Madame de Maintenon, was born in the prison of Niort in 1635, where her father was confined for debt: he was a bad man, had been accused of murder and forgery, and was then a ruined spendthrift. His father, Theodore Agrippa d'Aubigné, had been distinguished

for his attachment to Henry IV., and his zeal for the Protestant religion. Françoise d'Aubigné's paternal aunt, inheriting her father's religious zeal, took the child and educated her as a Calvinist; and it is worthy of remark how early in her childhood she showed, as a Calvinist, the same strong and constant religious preoccupation which she retained through life as a Catholic. Poverty had originally made her mother give her up; but being a zealous Catholic, she reclaimed her, and took her to mass, where the child showed such intentional disrespect that her mother slapped her face; upon which she presented her other cheek, and said, "Strike! it is good to suffer for the sake of religion." Other anecdotes are told of her spirit of resistance. Some time after this a rich and avaricious relation paid for her board at a convent; and after holding out long for one of such tender years, she was persuaded to abjure Calvinism at fourteen. This rich relation soon tired of paying for her, took her home and employed her in various household offices. Her helpless and dependent situation and her uncommon beauty inspired Scarron, to whose house her cousin had taken her, with compassion, and he offered her the choice between accepting a portion which might enable her to enter a convent, or becoming his wife.

She chose the latter. From a terrible adventure in his youth he had become a cripple, and was always in pain. He treated her as a daughter, and she behaved to him with filial attention. Her beauty and tact were additional attractions to the society that his wit had already brought around him, and his lodging was frequented by the most brilliant company, distinguished both for wit and rank. He took her to the Hôtel d'Albret, where his powers of amusing had made him a favourite guest. She was so childish and shy in those early days of her marriage that she cried because one day she was placed opposite to a window where she was stared at; another time, wishing to make herself agreeable, she began telling a story, but broke down in the middle, having forgotten all the particulars from sheer fright; and as she went away she heard the mistress of the house saying, "There goes a silly young woman!" Yet a few years afterwards her talent for telling stories was so remarkable, that one day at dinner the servant whispered to her, "Madame, one story more, for the roast meat is not forthcoming." This is both a trait of character and a trait of the times; it shows how much the power of entertaining was cultivated and prized. I doubt if any mistress of a house could now tell a story which would divert her guests from expecting

the roast meat. Before his marriage Scarron was visited by the gayest young men, who brought him all the good stories of the town, in which, however, humour predominated very much over decorum; but in a short time, in spite of her timidity, his wife had reformed the whole tone of the conversation. She must have acquired in this difficult position that dignity which years afterwards, when she was governess at Madame de Montespan's, made a gay courtier declare that he could more easily be wanting in respect to the queen than to her; and which obliged Louis XIV., when amusing himself in rather a rompish fashion with throwing back the arm-chairs of the ladies, to pass hers untouched, saying, "As for that one I dare not venture."

It would be difficult to specify exactly why and when the manners of society changed. Madame de Rambouillet had established a tone of extreme reserve compared to the general tone, and in opposition to that of the court. Various anecdotes prove that the latter had never reached an equal degree of propriety, though Louis XIII. might individually have lived with the *Précieuses*. But when Louis XIV. reigned, the high *noblesse* had lost the independence and originality which could openly maintain a set of manners and opinions in direct opposition to court

influence; and he hated the *Précieuses* and all their traditions with the true instinct of despotism. His system of lavishing money on his mistresses, and his absorption of all that remained of the independent spirit of the nation, would of themselves have lowered the general tone of society. Certain it is that after 1660 or 1670, we see much less of the high chivalrous respect and homage that had previously been paid to women. Madame de la Fayette's novel of the 'Princesse de Clèves' is the last and most perfect expression of the sentiments of the early part of the seventeenth century: even in the tender and gallant Racine, the lovers have a very different tone from those of Corneille. It was the correct conduct and manners of the *Précieuses*, joined to their lively wit, their conversation, their companionable qualities, and their talent for drawing out those faculties in others that made them the arbiters of society in their day. In the beginning of the century the most moral and reforming portion of society was also the most literary and imaginative. At no time in France was sincere religion—religion acting on the conduct—more genuine and respected, precisely because it was not a fashion; at no time was there such a total absence of religious persecution and hatred. We have seen that Julie d'Angenne had the portrait

of Gustavus Adolphus in her room, and several Protestants were among the high functionaries. At the same time there was no fanaticism; and it was even voted at the Hôtel Rambouillet that Polieucte, who *would* leave his young and virtuous wife to be a martyr, was exaggerated, although Corneille was their favourite poet. The honour in which love and sentiment were held, especially by the highly moral and serious portion of society, gave rise to the most romantic situations. Louis XIII. was a boy of fifteen when married to Anne of Austria from political motives: he disliked her and the feeling was mutual; yet he was far too scrupulous to have any other sentiment but a pure though very impassioned friendship for any other woman. This he felt for Mademoiselle de Hautefort, and confided to her the troubles of his melancholy mind. She was maid of honour to Anne of Austria, and devotedly attached to her mistress. She employed all her influence on the king in endeavouring to overcome his dislike to the queen. Mademoiselle de Hautefort's unfailing nobility of character is beautifully portrayed by M. Cousin. Mademoiselle du Vigean, passionately in love with Condé, who had also been married after the feudal fashion, took the veil for his sake, thus preventing him from trying to obtain a divorce

that he might marry her. In no other epoch of French history do we find unmarried women playing an important part in society. But at that time Julie d'Angenne, Mademoiselle de Montpensier, Mademoiselle Paulet, Mademoiselle de Scudéry and many others were persons of importance, of strict morality, having characters and opinions sufficiently striking and decided to inflence those of others, and very romantic sentiments. In Madame de Sévigné's letters we no longer find any influential unmarried ladies; but she had been a frequenter of the Hôtel Rambouillet when young, and she speaks in rapture of Mademoiselle de Scudéry.

The whole code of manners we have endeavoured to describe, as characterizing the early part of the seventeenth century, was quickly disappearing at the period we have now reached. Madame Scarron, quite as correct as her predecessors, but with a mind in which sense was the predominating quality, seems so much nearer to us than to them, that a hundred years might have elapsed between their age and hers. She was twenty-five when Scarron died, and, as all he had was a pension from the court, she remained in great poverty. She would not, however, accept of an asylum, either at the Hôtel de Richelieu or at the Hôtel d'Albret, and refused a rich match

because she disliked the suitor. For this she was greatly blamed, and there is something pathetic in a letter written to one of her best friends, in which she says: "And will you too blame me?" After going through some very hard times, the queen-mother granted her a pension, and she took up her abode in a little lodging. In her old age she often spoke of these her youthful days with one of her favourite nuns at St. Cyr, who wrote down the conversations at the time. In one of them she says: "When my lodging was furnished with borrowed goods, although I was in poverty, and had to go through situations very different from those in which you have seen me, I was cheerful and very happy. I was free, I used to go to the Hôtel d'Albret or Richelieu, certain of a welcome and of meeting all my friends assembled there; or they would come to me if I merely let them know I should be at home." This shows how little either she or they cared for the little shabby lodging and the borrowed furniture. When the queen-mother died she fell again into extreme poverty, and was going to Portugal to take some place at court, when Madame de Montespan, who had often met her at the Hôtel d'Albret, persuaded her to remain, and obtained a renewal of her pension from Louis XIV. Not long after

this she was persuaded to take charge of Madame de Montespan's children—though with great difficulty—having scruples on account of their birth, notwithstanding that her confessor exhorted her to accept the offer. It was not until Louis XIV. had seen her; and, saying they were his children, told her it was his desire that she should take charge of them, that she yielded, thinking it right to obey as a subject. The eldest was then a year old; the second, afterwards the Duke du Maine, was just born. During the long negotiation that preceded her acceptance, she repeatedly declared she was unfit for the office; but when she had undertaken it she filled it with a sort of passion, as if her previous single life had, unknown to herself, pent up a whole array of maternal feelings—feelings so natural to all women who have never been the slaves of other passions. The utmost secrecy was strictly required to conceal the existence of these children. They were placed with their nurses in a small house on the outskirts of Paris; and when Madame Scarron was not with them she went into society, that her absence might cause no surmises. She relates, in some of the conversations preserved by the nun of St. Cyr: "I climbed up a ladder to do the work of the upholsterer, in order that no workman might penetrate into the

house; the nurses never did anything, lest they should be fatigued and the infants should suffer. I often went from one house to another on foot, muffled up, carrying clothes, meat, &c., and I sometimes sat up all night when one or other was sick. I returned home in the evening, and went to the Hôtel d'Albret, lest my friends should wonder at my absence. I had myself bled several times to prevent my habit of blushing, which when I was questioned might have created suspicions." This life lasted three years, and the account is confirmed by many of Madame de Sévigné's letters. After this, the family increasing, and Madame de Montespan or Louis XIV. growing more shameless, a large house was bought, where Madame Scarron was established with the children. The eldest, a girl, died when three years old; she nursed her tenderly, and mourned for her far more than the mother. Louis XIV. was struck with this, and for the first time seems to have really noticed her, saying, "She knows how to love; it would be a pleasure to be loved by her." As she was now established in a house, he seems to have gone frequently to see the children: he doated on the Duke du Maine. One day, coming in unexpectedly, he found her holding this darling son, rocking with her foot the cradle containing a little

girl, and with the youngest, a baby, asleep on her lap. They had all had the measles; the attendants were worn out with watching, and she had herself been up three nights with them. In a letter to Madame de St. Géran she relates that the king, talking with the little boy, and pleased with his answers, said, "You are very sensible." "I must be so," answered the child, "for I have a governess who is sense itself." "Go and tell her," said Louis XIV., "that you will give her 100,000 francs to-night for her *dragées*," (it was New Year's Eve). Many more of these intimate details, which she writes to her friend, prove that the first cause of Louis' attention to her was her fondness for his children. To say it far exceeded that of the mother would be saying nothing, for *she* seems to have thought little about them. When the boy was four years old Madame Scarron took him to Antwerp, to a famous quack doctor, for a lameness, with which he was afflicted, and writing to his mother, she concludes thus: "It is but just I should pass for his mother, for I have the fondness of one, and feel all his sufferings as if they were my own." Another time she says: "I own, madam, that I am troubled at the idea of trusting the child to him (the doctor), but I must obey. To-morrow he begins his treatment;

I suffer beforehand all he will go through. It is now that you might reproach me with my excessive fondness for him." Madame de Montespan's temper made Madame Scarron express many times in her letters the wish to leave her, long before any jealousy could have been thought of. In one letter she says: "It is folly to be so fond of other people's children;" in another: "Nothing but my love for these children could make me endure this servitude."

In 1672 a letter of Madame Scarron's to an intimate friend shows us the first of the long series of royal quarrels and reconciliations, repentances and backslidings, which followed. "What you ask about is no longer a mystery, except in the provinces I can tell you how it happened, as I had it from M. de Noailles. The fair lady" (Madame de Montespan), "having been to confession, the priest refused to give her absolution. She was astonished, and complained to the king, who was himself greatly surprised, but would not blame the priest without inquiring first of M. de Montausier, whom he esteems, what he thought of the matter. His answer was short and explicit enough: 'The priest has done his duty.' Bossuet was present, and was of the same opinion, though he did not express it as tersely as Montausier. For the king to hear the truth is

enough. He rose greatly agitated and said, 'I promise to see her no more.' Till now he has kept his word. The lady is inexpressibly angry; she has seen no one these two days. No one pities her, although she had conferred favours on everybody. The queen sent yesterday to know how she was. Her answer was, 'You know I am dying, but I am very well.' The whole court is at Madame de Montausier's (Julie d'Angenne)." Louis joined the army in Flanders, but on his return became more enslaved than ever. His extreme fondness for his children was the first cause of his seeing so much of Madame Scarron, and his prejudice against her as a *Précieuse* being once overcome, he must have found her conversation far more *piquante* than that of any other woman he ever met with. She had seen varieties of life that none of the fine ladies had an idea of; she had lived nine years with Scarron, a man whose humour attracted all the cleverest people in Paris; she had spent nine more in poverty, but in the best company, having the power to draw it to her little lodging; and all this time she had been improving the tact and talent Nature had given her. In one of her letters, written long afterwards, she alludes to some story of her early days which had particularly amused the king. Madame de Montespan

too was witty and entertaining; she was especially gifted with the talent of showing the ridiculous side of every one; but constant mockery becomes monotonous. The best proof of Madame Scarron's wonderful powers is shown in an incident that happened some time later than the period we have now reached. On one of the court journeys, the two ladies were put in the same carriage, when Madame de Montespan exclaimed: "Don't let us play the fool on this occasion, let us converse as if we had no quarrels. We'll agree not to be a bit better friends after our journey's over; we'll take up our contentions when we get home." Madame Scarron agreed; they were both charming, and enjoyed the journey. Madame de Montespan's temper was kept constantly irritated by Louis' partial infidelities, alternating with fits of devotion, which made him at times separate from her. All this irritation she vented on Madame Scarron, who would on such occasions request her dismissal; but to this Louis XIV. would never consent. Once he happened to come in the midst of a quarrel. Madame Scarron begged to speak to him alone, that she might plead her own cause. She then told him all she had to suffer from Madame de Montespan's tyranny, and declared her to be void of all feeling and heart. The king, trying

to soften her, said, "Have you not often observed how her beautiful eyes fill with tears when an affecting or noble action is related to her?" This incident gives a more favourable idea of both these fallible individuals than many stories of greater apparent weight. Another time he said, "My negotiations with these two women give me more trouble than any in Europe."

As the children grew older the affection of Madame Scarron increased. She took the Duc du Maine to Barège; he might then have been between seven and nine years of age. On her return she took him to the king, merely holding him by the hand, his lameness having almost disappeared: the father was in raptures. In a letter written about this time she says, "I have not two days' quiet; the mother sets the king against me; the son reconciles him to me." The king had given her handsome presents at different times, which enabled her to buy the estate of Maintenon, from which she thenceforward took her name. He was in the habit of having long conversations with her, and in many of her letters she expresses her constant thought and hope that he will reform and, as she says, think of his future. She was supposed by all the court to be in high favour. Her affection for the children never flagged. We find her constantly complaining that they are

ill fed, and that she cannot manage them as she likes, &c. Though she now had the estate of Maintenon, she was still the dependent of Madame de Montespan, and could not leave her. The following letter, dated 1679, shows the state of things after she had been with her ten years:—

"Madame de Montespan accused me of loving the king. I laughed at her, and said it would ill become her to reproach me with a fault she had so long committed. But she added, 'Don't take it into your head that he loves a person——' here she stopped. It is the first time I have seen her command herself in her anger. She assured me that my favour with the king would end with her own; I answered gravely and firmly that at my age (forty-four) it was impossible to inspire jealousy in any one of a sound mind; that my conduct, which she had witnessed for ten years, gave the lie to all her accusations; that, so far was I from having any of the designs she supposed, she knew I had many times begged of her to obtain leave for me to retire; but that I would no longer endure her haughty behaviour—that her temper was shortening my life. 'And who keeps you here now?' she said. 'The king's will,' I answered, 'my duty, my gratitude, and the interest of my relations.' Here the conversation

ended; I am now alone to mourn over my troubles and to console myself with you."

At this time the king would frequently spend two hours in serious conversation with her, and she often expresses hopes of his amendment. In a letter written shortly afterwards she says:—"I talked to him of the Père Bourdaloue; he listened attentively; perhaps he is nearer to reformation than people think. It would be sad indeed if God did not give light to a soul that seems made for Him." In another letter, written about this time, 1680, she says:—"The king's kindness to me does not make up for the loss of my peace. Madame de Montespan will have it that I want to be his mistress; 'but,' said I, 'has he three then?' 'Yes,' she answered; 'me, nominally; that girl (Mademoiselle de Fontanges); and you have his heart.' I very quietly represented to her that she listened too much to her passions. She answered, 'That she knew my artifices.' She taunted me with her bounty, her presents and those of the king; and yet I cannot believe she hates me, neither can I dislike her." Again she writes:—"The king doats on his son, but his love for the mother is now mere habit. Sometimes he reads the Scriptures: he owns his weaknesses. We must wait for grace." At this time Mademoiselle de

Fontanges was the reigning favourite. In 1680, Madame Scarron, now Madame de Maintenon, describes the following scene to a friend:—"Yesterday the king had a very warm conversation with Madame de Montespan; I was present: Diane (Mademoiselle de Fontanges) was the subject. I was struck with the king's command of temper, and the way in which pride and passion carried her along; till at last he concluded by these astounding words:—'I have said it; I will not be interfered with.' Madame de Montespan asks my advice; I talk of religion, and she thinks I have an understanding with the king, who says he still loves her more than he wishes. The Duc du Maine draws him to his mother; he can't look at him without being moved."

However, shortly after this, Madame de Montespan was made grand mistress of the wardrobe—the highest function at court for a lady; and this was the seal of final separation between her and the king. The Duc du Maine, grown older, was put under a governor; and Madame de Maintenon, being named second lady-in-waiting to the dauphiness, was at length entirely independent of Madame de Montespan.

Madame de Sévigné writes:—"The king has endless conversations with Madame de Maintenon.

All the time he used to spend with Madame de Montespan is now spent at the dauphiness'. He goes there in the morning, remaining several hours in Madame de Maintenon's room, talking with an ease and friendliness that make her place the most agreeable imaginable." Yet all this time his passion for the beautiful Fontanges was at its height. After a disastrous confinement she became so ill that she was obliged to go into the country to a convent where her sister was abbess. Four carriages with six horses and outriders in grand liveries—her own carriage having eight horses—and waggons loaded with finery, filled the court-yard, waiting to carry her away. She was created a duchess, and given a large income; "but pale and wan she entered the carriage, pining only for health and for the king's heart." This is Madame de Sévigné's account. In another letter she says:—"No friend ever had such care and attention as the king shows to Madame de Maintenon. When the dauphiness goes into her room she finds them each ensconced in a large arm-chair, conversing together. The whole court is at her feet. It is just what I have often said; she has shown him quite a new country; I mean the intercourse of friendship and intimate conversation without quarrels or restraint." These words of

Madame de Sévigné explain it all; she was a woman of her time, and understood it.

The beautiful Fontanges died in 1681, when only twenty, her last months being spent in retirement and devotion in a convent. Remorse for her early death filled the king with deep melancholy. In one of the editions of Madame de Maintenon's letters she says:—"The king owned to me that he had loved Fontanges more than his own soul." The genuineness of this letter has been contested; but his entire change of life from that time is a proof of the effect this solemn event had upon him. It was not, however, a sudden conversion. For several years Madame de Maintenon's letters are full of hopes for his reformation, and religion was the chief subject of their conversation. Before Mademoiselle de Fontanges' death the king's friendship for Madame de Maintenon brought her many complimentary letters from her friends. She naturally answers, "Forty-five is no longer the age for pleasing; virtue is of all ages: God only knows the truth." After this melancholy death the king remained entirely at Versailles, spending much time with his family. The birth of his first grandchild was the seal to the family union, and he insisted upon being the earliest to inform the queen of the event. Though

a grandfather, it must be remembered he was but forty-two. Madame de Montespan, whom he saw occasionally in a friendly way, would still go on hoping. Madame de Maintenon writes:—"People say I want to take her place; they little know my repugnance for such connections, and the desire I have that the king should feel the same."

It has been said that Madame de Maintenon's devotion was mere calculation. She persuaded the king that it was his duty as a religious man to give up all his former errors and to live with his wife in domestic union. Marie Thérèse doated on her husband, and was so grateful to her advocate that she presented her with her portrait; which gift, Madame de Maintenon writes, gave her more pleasure than anything else had done since she had been at court. Louis would sit and talk with his wife for hours; but she did not long enjoy the happiness so lately found; she died in 1683, and on her death he exclaimed, "This is the first sorrow she has ever caused me." Madame de Maintenon was with her to the last. When all was over, she was retiring, but the Duc de la Rochefoucault, the king's favourite, urged her to go into his *cabinet*, saying, "This is not a moment to leave the king alone." I suppose there is a great and strange pleasure in attributing bad motives to

every good action, for it is strong enough to be indulged in at the total expense of common sense: the present is a remarkable instance of it. Madame de Maintenon was three years older than the queen when her exhortations succeeded in renewing the union between her and the king. The queen's early death was totally unexpected, and yet Madame de Maintenon has been invariably accused of persuading the king to be religious for her own ends. That she was highly gratified, both by his attentions to her and by the thought of having contributed so effectually to his reformation, was so natural that it would have been hypocrisy to have concealed it; and she speaks of him as "l'homme le plus aimable de son royaume." Several of her letters contain indications of a marked difference in her spirits before her marriage and afterwards, which, unknown to herself, betray that the king was more charming as a friend than as a husband;—not a very unusual case with common mortals. Nothing, however, proves so completely that the dearest object of her life before her marriage with the king was his conversion, than the constancy with which she pursued it after she had become his wife. Her mind was ever preoccupied with the thought: she complains "that he has given up reading the

Scriptures with her at certain hours, as he used to do;" and it appears as if to please her he had talked more of religion before marrying than after. From her earliest youth she was a most fascinating and at the same time most entertaining person. We have seen that Madame de Montespan enjoyed her society even when she was jealous of her. This power of pleasing was natural to her; and she reproaches herself in her letters to her confessor with being too fond of making herself agreeable. She did no more for the king than for every one she saw: she charmed him by her conversation and manners.

After the queen's death, Louis spent most of his time with Madame de Maintenon, and they were privately married in 1685, in the chapel of Versailles, in the presence of the Archbishop of Paris, M. de Monchevreuil, the preceptor of the Duc du Maine, and Bontemps, the king's valet. Thus did the widow of Scarron, the last of the *Précieuses*, become the wife of the proudest monarch in Europe. Thus did the king, who had never been without a mistress, young, gay, and handsome, marry a woman of fifty, three years older than himself; and during the thirty years that their union lasted he scarcely ever left her, even for a few days. She was still remarkably handsome and young-looking; but when com-

pared to the youthful court beauties, we cannot suppose this to have been her real attraction. I have given all these details in vain if I have not shown that she is a striking proof of the national taste for that companionship with women in which beauty and youth are of less account than sympathy.

The king transacted all the business of the state in his wife's *cabinet*. She was always present, working tapestry during the councils, never speaking but when consulted; he would say, "Well, and what does your solidity think of it?" At a great review of the troops before their departure for the war she was carried through the ranks in a sedan chair, he walking beside it for four hours with his hat in his hand, explaining all the manœuvres to her, to the indignation of St. Simon, who relates the circumstance.

After the king's death she wrote down the following account of his last few days:—"He bade me adieu three times: the first time he said his only regret was parting from me, but that we should soon meet; I implored him to think only of God. He then entreated me to forgive him for not having behaved well enough, and said that he had not made me happy, but that he had always loved and esteemed me; he wept, and asked if we were alone, and then added, 'But if any one should hear

that I am affected at this separation they could not be surprised.' I then left him, thinking this was too much for him. The third time he said, 'What will become of you, for you have nothing?' I answered, 'I am nothing' (je suis un rien); 'think only of God;' and then I went away; but after a few steps I bethought myself of the possible treatment I might receive from the princes, and that it would be well to ask him to request the Duke of Orleans to be kind to me. He did so in these words: 'Nephew, I commend Madame de Maintenon to you; you know how much I esteem and respect her. She never gave me advice that was not good; I should have done right to have followed it always; she has been useful to me in every way, but especially has she forwarded the good of my soul: do everything she asks of you." The last day I saw him, as I was constantly there, he said, 'I admire your courage in remaining present at this mournful spectacle.'"

Madame de Maintenon has been accused of leaving him before he breathed his last: she remained till all consciousness was gone; she had watched him many days and nights; she was eighty years old, and so weak and worn out that when she reached St. Cyr she went to bed for several days, unable to see any one. Both the confessor and the doctor assured her

there was no hope of returning consciousness, and she had been told that the mob might attack her on her way home after his death; for though she had wisely used all her influence to persuade the king not to go to war, she was accused of all the distress and misery the last war had brought on.

Her whole annual income had been 1900*l.* (48,000f.), secured on the king's privy purse, which the regent continued to pay. He behaved well, and took her part against her enemies. It seems extraordinary she should have had any, when we read her own letters, or even the abuse of her enemies, impartially. At the summit of power, in an age of extravagance, after millions had been lavished on mistresses, the only expense she indulged in was founding a convent for the education of young ladies; and to judge of her economy in the management of this undertaking, her letters should be read. She was reproached by her family for not doing enough for them. Her answer was, that she could not conscientiously spend the money of the state upon them.

She has been accused of the persecutions exercised on the Protestants. In a letter to her brother she says, "I have heard great complaints of you which do you no credit. You treat the Huguenots ill; you even seek for opportunities to do so. Such behaviour is un-

becoming a gentleman. Pity people more unfortunate than wrong. They have the same errors we had ourselves; violence would not have changed us. Henry IV. professed the same religion, and so have other great princes; therefore do not persecute them. We must draw them towards us by gentleness and charity. Jesus Christ has set us the example." This letter is conclusive as to her feelings in 1672. During the period of her highest favour, from about 1679 to the queen's death, there is in her letters the tone of independence of a woman who has more power than she ever expected or sought for. She even at times evinces higher spirits than were habitual to her subdued and thoughtful nature. She is the friend and counsellor of the most powerful monarch and of a most agreeable man, whom she greatly admires; but she has no expectation of being anything else, and wishes only to convert him to a moral and religious life. After her marriage the change is remarkable. She is the respected and trusted, but very submissive, wife. All her spirits are gone, and, as time wears on, an overwhelming weariness increases upon her, till at last she finds neither rest nor ease anywhere but at St. Cyr. She even says so to her favourite nun, Mademoiselle d'Aumale, in those conversations which remain so striking an illustration

of the small amount of happiness the highest position can give. All the timidity of her early youth revived. It has been said that her backwardness in defending the Protestants was owing to her having been one herself. But in reality, far from having sufficient power to defend the Protestants, she dared not even continue to take the part of the Archbishop of Paris, Cardinal de Noailles, when he was opposed by the Jesuits, although her numerous letters to him prove the greatest friendship. She entreats him by every argument to submit to the latter, and when he resists she gives him up. Although she hated the Jesuits, she never tried to prevent Louis XIV. from taking Père le Tellier, one of the worst of them, for his confessor. She never ventured a word in favour of the Jansenists, the Quietists, or even of Fénélon, whom she admired beyond all men. It seems scarcely credible that so humane a person should not have endeavoured to prevent the cruelties that were practised, though not half were known to her. But although the king could not bear her absence, even during the council, and treated her with the greatest deference, the moment he suspected her of trying to influence his ministers, he broke out into such harsh rebukes that her proud and timid nature would shrink from provoking a recurrence of them. It was no doubt for

such unkindness as this that he reproached himself on his death-bed. But he had never comprehended, nor perhaps had she, that his religion was nothing but a transposition of his selfish and arbitrary habits. He was awakened by her to the consideration of what his own fate might be after his death; and when he changed his views, the whole nation, having no right to judge for itself, was to think exactly as he did. This is to be lamented, for he had fine points in his nature; but it is an axiom, not yet generally recognized, that those who submit to a despotism are the most wicked demoralizers of the despot, who himself is but a weak mortal. Madame de Maintenon was unconsciously worn out by this selfishness. Four years before the king's death, she tells Mademoiselle d'Aumale that for twenty-six years she had never said a word to give Louis a moment of uneasiness, and that when she was in trouble she would conceal her tears the moment she saw him enter, and be cheerful and entertaining. Madame de Maintenon's ambition was neither to govern Louis nor the nation. Her sole object was to make him religious in order to save his soul, and for this purpose she even assumed courage to exhort him at times more than he liked. It is true that as she advanced in life she became more and more orthodox, and at the same time more anxious that the kingdom

should become so too. The reaction that followed, under the regent, showed how futile is the attempt to coerce the consciences of others.

No opinion is too absurd for hatred and prejudice to adopt. Madame de Maintenon has been abused for wishing her marriage to be acknowledged: as if any woman in any rank could endure a doubt on such a subject. But the third time she broached the matter to the king, he begged that for his peace she would say no more about it; and with her usual self-abnegation she obeyed. She burnt all the king's letters and the papers that might have proved it. The conviction of the court was due to hints given by Louis himself. Among many others, he said to his brother, who came to see him when he was ill in bed, and she was nursing him, "You may judge from what you see what madame is to me." She occupied the queen's apartment, had the royal seat in the chapel, and was admitted into the Carmelite convent, a right reserved to queens only. She tells Mademoiselle d'Aumale that the king would often say to her, "But you have nothing, madam; do see what I can do for you before I die." She begged him not to think about it, as she had enough;† that if she had

* She had given the estate of Maintenon to her niece as a marriage portion.

† 1900*l.* a year on the privy purse, which would cease with Louis's death.

more she would be no richer, for she should give it away; and, she adds to Mademoiselle d'Aumale, "The king's revenues belong to the kingdom; they are drawn from the people, and should return to them, and not be employed to administer to a woman's luxury. I say luxury, for in my present state, as I cannot suffer any privation by my charities, they are only a species of luxury—very allowable, but without the slightest merit." Regret for her youthful days, when she was poor and free, would often betray itself. Walking by a fish-pond at Marly with her niece, who remarked that the carp seemed dull and heavy, she said, "They are like me, they regret their native mud."

No woman of the time, except Madame de Sévigné, wrote such letters as she did. And though inferior in grace and playfulness to those of the charming marquise, they have far more depth, and a conciseness and firmness of expression quite as original in their way. Her letters to the nuns of St. Cyr, on their religious improvement, on the education of the young ladies, on economy and administration, might serve as lessons to the end of time: and when she indulges in anecdote, how much she throws into a few words! The following, to her niece, is a specimen:—"How many things have I seen! The

Duchesse de Bourgogne obtained everything she liked by ways and means that would have sunk another into the deepest disgrace. Madame de Montespan would tie six mice to a little filigree carriage and let them bite her beautiful hands. She had pigs and goats in her gilt and painted chambers. The king would show her to the minister as a child, exclaiming on the playfulness of the Mortemarts; but she knew every secret of the state, and gave very good advice, and very bad, according to her passions."

Immediately after the king's death she sold her carriage, reduced her establishment of servants, gave up fine liveries, and conformed to all the rules of the convent, which she never left till her death in April 1719. She told her niece to prevent as much as possible all visits. She survived Louis three years and a half. Her favourite occupation was the education of the young ladies. Her death was hastened by her anxiety about the Duc du Maine, who had been imprisoned. Strange, that the only faults of one who has been accused of calculation and cold-heartedness were her unreasonable religious bigotry and her passion for the Duc du Maine, which made her persuade Louis to alter for him the laws of the kingdom. The Duc was accused and imprisoned for this,

and her last days were in consequence embittered. The small amount of the property she had to bequeath is another proof of her disinterested spirit.

We have seen how men of letters owed to the great ladies of France their social importance. To Madame de Maintenon young ladies owe the first convent instituted expressly for education; an example followed all over Europe, and imitated in Protestant countries in the form of schools and colleges. She was the first who thought of a general system to improve the education of women. She not only founded St. Cyr, she made the management of it her constant occupation. She wrote two volumes of letters about the solid foundation which she desired to see given to the education of the pupils; and to her object of giving grace to their deportment and refined taste to their minds, we owe the two most perfect dramatic poems (I do not say dramas) in the language—'Athalie' and 'Esther.' Madame de Maintenon's mind was one that was constantly occupied in reflecting deeply on human life, on her sex, and its various duties. Her taste was exquisite, and she wished to see grace in women added to piety and sense. She was warned that so much encouragement to outward attractions might impair the pious character of her establishment, but she could

not give up the hope of obtaining both. Racine, after writing the above-named dramas, taught the pupils to recite them. Louis XIV. was charmed with the result. At first only the most favoured courtiers were admitted, but by degrees the audience was extended, and the beauty and innocence of the youthful exhibitors, added to the effects of Racine's teaching, turned the heads of the whole court, the king included. Could it be expected that the young ladies would remain as unconscious as learned canary birds? They found out their attractions, and their simplicity suffered a little in consequence. Madame de Maintenon saw the danger, acknowledged her mistake, and at once put an end to these representations, which (Madame de Sévigné writes) were incomparably charming. This is the last trait I shall give of Madame de Maintenon's character. The convent lasted till 1793, when, exactly one hundred years after its foundation, it was pillaged and the nuns dispersed. Madame de Maintenon's body was torn out of its coffin, and thus shared the fate of those of the royal family buried at St. Denis.

CHAPTER IX.

CONCLUSION.

In England women are highly esteemed, and they deserve it. They have slowly established their own position. But in France the society of women, independent of their individual merits, has been indispensable for centuries; and, as a general rule, few men past thirty will go habitually to a house for social intercourse and conversation unless they like the mistress of it. The clubs in England and the *salons* in France have long been places where, like the porticos of Athens, public affairs have been discussed and public men criticised. The peculiar social customs of France, though they originated in the gallantry of the chivalrous ages, have long been modified, as I have endeavoured to show. The worship of women has been exchanged for pleasure in their companionship; and a continuation of the history of society during the seventeenth century would go far to prove that, although beauty and grace were of

course no drawbacks, the custom has been universal of seeking the society of women rather from sympathy with their minds than from admiration for their outward attractions.

In some very interesting letters of M. de Tocqueville, just published, he laments that women have lost their influence in France; but those very letters are a proof that they have still a very different position there from that they occupy elsewhere. They are addressed to Madame Swetchine, a Russian lady, who for more than thirty years was surrounded by the most distinguished of what might be called the Catholic religious world, and by many others who, like himself, did not belong to it. She was nearly eighty when she died. She had never been remarkable for beauty or riches. She was not young when she first came to Paris, and had no literary celebrity. In no other country could she have acquired the position which, from all the letters addressed to her, and the society which every evening assembled at her house, it is evident she possessed. Her merit was no doubt the cause of her influence, but where else could mere intellectual merit in a woman produce such an effect? In England a woman's beauty and her virtues are what every man thinks of in a wife. He talks with rapture of the woman who will nurse

him and make his tea; but she is *his* wife; he cares nothing for the society of any other woman, neither is this wife anything to the rest of society. In France such gifts are of course valuable to the husband, but the wife has others which are important not only to him but to society, to whom her nursing capacities and her coffee are not so interesting as her companionable qualities. *A-t-elle de l'esprit?* is the first question asked, and the husband is as much interested in it as his friends; for not only will her *esprit* amuse him when they are alone, but it will also make his house the resort of an agreeable circle, and he is scarcely French if he is indifferent to these advantages. *De l'esprit* does not mean great wit; it is rather that quick perception which seizes the ideas of others easily and returns ready change for them. Society and conversation are still necessaries of life, though the refined literary taste has lost much of its delicacy since politics have become the universal topic. I know men who would rather live in extreme poverty in Paris than go elsewhere for a comfortable income; not for love of the locality, but because no privation is so great to them as the loss of that interchange of thought which they find so easily there. Why does a man in England prefer his club to the drawing-room where a lady

presides? Why do men in Germany never go into general society but by special invitation, and where there is a supper to make it bearable? They say that they are fonder of their homes than the French; but this answer is a very unsatisfactory one to those who know how the club palaces in London are filled to overflowing, and how in all the towns in Germany the gentlemen meet every evening at a public-house where smoking and drinking serve instead of the French stimulus of trying to please. It is evidently not for the purpose of staying at home that they abstain from *salons* and the conversation of women.

There is something still very oriental in the notions on society of these Indo-Germanic nations; for if a man is at his club he does not consider it natural that his wife should have habitual callers in the evening to amuse her with the news of the day, as is the custom in Paris. He considers it right that she should sit alone expecting his return. But still more oriental is the absence of sympathy between his wife and his friends. There are old and frequent jests, from the days of the 'Tatler' down to our own, about the cross looks of a wife if a husband brings home a friend unexpectedly to a plain dinner; and no wonder that she should look cross, for the two gentlemen converse the whole time together; she is

scarcely expected even to listen, so that the friend's presence throws her into complete solitude. In France he would appeal to her, and the habit of being attended to would bring out whatever powers or vivacity she possessed, and she would generally be found quite equal to the questions discussed. So natural to the French is this companionship between men and women, that we find it among the very dregs of society. The revolutionary clubs were no sooner formed than they were frequented by the *Tricoteuses*, who were merely the women belonging to the Terrorist party. They took their knitting, the constant occupation of the lower classes in those days, were present during the meetings, and gave their opinions. It is not an attractive picture, but it is a true one.

Whatever the cause may be, the effect is certain. I do not say that women are not politely treated in English society; on the contrary, I have often been struck with the patronizing and kindly manner with which a gentleman approaches a lady and endeavours to draw her out; but he does so entirely from good feeling, and so little for his own satisfaction that she ought to be the more obliged. It is almost touching to watch the care an English gentleman will take of his wife or daughter, or any lady confided to his care, in travelling. All the kindness of his nature, the old

chivralous feelings of protecting the delicate and helpless are called out; he will give up every comfort, resign his greatcoats and plaids, and bear the cold and the rain in order to preserve the ladies from a breath of wind; but, when he gets back, he runs to his club for society and conversation. A real English gentleman will be as attentive, perhaps more so, than a French one to any woman he meets in distress or embarrassment, for in England revolutions have not destroyed certain habits of aristocratic good breeding; yet his chivalrous kindness will be entirely owing to the good will and good feeling he entertains towards the weaker sex. But a selfish man in France, though he may do far less for an unprotected female, will, if he spies a look of intelligence, try to converse with her for his own pleasure, and, if her conversation is *piquante,* he will be her humble servant as long as he can. The English gentleman will avoid all communication except for purposes useful to her; and who has a right to blame him? He has done more than his duty. He cannot help it if he finds no charm in her society.

This difference in the French imagination is a plain fact, and explains why women in France have done things they could not have accomplished elsewhere. It is in consequence of this sympathy for the sort of

mind that women have, when cultivated, that the middle-aged and the old women retain the same relative value in France that men have. The appellation of "old woman," applied to a man because he is a fool of a certain twaddling description, is there unknown. Old women are thought as capable of wisdom as old men. In fact a clever woman is more sought after than a clever man, because she has been the companion, the friend, and the confidante of many persons, and therefore knows more of the inner life, has more sympathy, is a better listener, and can give better advice. So thought Louis XIV. when he said to Madame de Maintenon, "What does your solidity think of it?" There is another reason which would make such an expression as "Old woman" impossible. All men reverence their mothers in France; the filial sentiment is strong to a degree of superstition. Much has been said of the immorality of the French stage of late, and not without justice. But nothing has been said of the numerous plays that have turned on this affection. Both the good and the mediocre, from 'Péril en la Demeure,' 'Je dîne chez ma Mère,' to the 'Famille Puimenée,' &c., all show that women, as mothers, not only have a higher authority than elsewhere, but that imagina-

tion has, in France, thrown a sacred and poetical halo over the mother as in other countries over the bride.

The difference in the position of a witty old lady in France and in England is particularly well brought out in the letters of Madame du Deffand to Horace Walpole. She, whose visits to the Duc and Duchesse de Choiseul at the height of their fashion are a compliment they are proud to receive, whom a German sovereign visiting Paris goes to see in her convent on account of her great reputation, who corresponds with Voltaire and all the wits of her time; she, when blind and seventy-eight years old, cannot dream that any one will misunderstand her warm friendship for him, or that he can be otherwise than flattered by it. But, as in England, a blind old woman was only a pitiable object, Horace Walpole is in a ludicrous state of terror lest her letters should be seen, for he fancies people might think she is in love with him, forsooth. This impassioned friendship, so congenial to the French, was a thing so little understood by the English, that they could not believe it to be anything but love. Horace Walpole knew better, but he knew also that no one else in London would.

Nothing grows up in a day; there is not a custom, a saying, a feeling, that has not taken centuries to create, and it is the work of eight centuries that we see in the present position of women in France. It began with the great feudal dames of the eleventh century, and has filtered downwards by degrees, and penetrated the whole nation. To it is due the habitual belief in women's capacity—so much higher in France than in other countries—which runs through all classes, and may be proved by the numbers employed in business. They keep the accounts of all the shops. If a woman has a lawsuit she follows it up herself; goes to her lawyer, gives him her ideas, and he gets less out of patience with her than he would with her husband. He never thinks of exclaiming: "What plagues women are about business!" for he thinks she has a full right to look after her own. We have seen during the Fronde and before it something of the power they had. Later, when St. Simon recapitulates the best sources of information he had for his memoirs, he describes and analyzes the peculiar talents of some of the women who are his intimate friends, and explains how useful they are to him; he has long and confidential talks with them; Madame de St. Simon he continually quotes

as wiser than himself. When the Princesse des Ursins came back from Spain, he spent eight hours with her; and he says, "These eight hours of conversation with a person who brought to it so many interesting particulars, appeared to me like eight moments." The peculiar aptness of the French language for conversation, the subdued and graceful shading of its expressions, are due, not indeed to women alone, but certainly to the polished and refined conversation that has been habitual between men and women; such intercourse requiring much precaution and delicacy of expression.

But, if women have so many more social privileges in France, it is to be expected that they should participate in the social difficulties of men; and accordingly we see Madame de Staël, Madame de Chevreuse, Madame Récamier, exiled merely for their opinions, for they meddled in no conspiracies. In the revolution, women, like men, were guillotined for being aristocrats, royalists, *suspectes de modérantisme*, or for conspiracy against the republic or the Terrorists. And how they mounted the scaffold! Madame Roland's last words might have been spoken by a Brutus; she looked up at the statue of Liberty, and exclaimed, "O Liberty, what crimes

have been committed in thy name!" I forget if this is mentioned in her life, but an old doctor, named Rimoneau, whom I knew when I was a girl, was present, and assured me he had heard it. He was one of the *Comité du Salut Public* who condemned her; and though he would have saved her if he could, he was neither a friend of hers nor a hero, and it would have been risking his own life to attempt it. Her whole political career was worthy of her death; no speeches of the Girondins, to whose party her husband belonged, were more eloquent than those she wrote for him. In La Vendée the armies counted many combatants on both sides who were women; they fought and died for their opinions. Charlotte Corday killed Marat to deliver her country from a wretch; she was guillotined, and she expected it. During the days of Terror women were imprisoned, and led one after another to the scaffold, and there is not a record of cowardice amongst them, except in the case of the miserable Madame Dubarry.

But no page in French history shows the importance of women more than the life of Madame de Staël. She was the only person in fact who resisted Bonaparte; others merely remained in retirement, and therefore it was that he followed no one

else with such unrelenting animosity. To banish her and destroy her books might surely have sufficed; but, as we have seen in Madame Récamier's life, by a peculiar refinement of despotic cruelty, he assailed her in her most sensitive point by persecuting her friends. In addition to this, through all the years of the empire, his newspapers kept up a series of half-slanderous attacks, which no one was allowed to refute. Women are not half grateful enough to Madame de Staël for the honour she conferred upon her sex by taking up the noble side of every question, armed with her pen and her eloquence, and never once calculating what the consequences might be; by standing alone, in fact, against this man of might. But, as time goes on, and details sink into their proportionate insignificance, she will rise as the grand figure who withstood Bonaparte at the head of six hundred thousand men, with Europe at his back. His vanity was such that he could not bear one woman should refuse to praise him, for that was all she was guilty of. M. de Tocqueville, in the letters already mentioned, complains of the present indifference of women to the public good, and of the injurious influence of that indifference on men. The honour he does to them of being indignant

is due to their noble bearing in the revolution, which was a favourite topic among the elders in his childhood. At any rate his letters bring Madame de Staël to mind. In her was revived the sort of influence exercised in the seventeenth century. Though all else was changed she possessed the same spirit which made Madame de Rambouillet withstand Richelieu, and maintain the equality of genius with rank.

With Madame de Staël I close this account of the women who have helped to raise the public mind, and am happy in thus doing homage to the honoured name that made me thrill in my earliest youth. It may be thought that I have given a more favourable picture than suits the preconceived opinions of the public on this subject, and a word of explanation may be necessary. If a botanist travels into regions hitherto unexplored we do not expect him to bring back specimens of common nettles and thistles, such as grow at our own doors, although he may see abundance of these. But if some beautiful and unknown flowers, peculiar to the country, are spied out by him, waving on high places and over Alpine precipices, he is no naturalist if he does not risk his neck to reach and gather them. And if his

devotion to science enable him to bring back an herbarium such as only an ardent botanist like himself could have collected, and he is then accused by the travellers who have merely hurried across the country of giving a false notion of its produce, his answer will be: "Friends and fellow-travellers, I am sorry for you. I show you the plants I have gathered far off in the land where you too have travelled. Seeing is believing; look at them. Did I fabricate them? Are they real? If you did not see them yourselves it is because your eyes were caught by the nettles; you took no delight in climbing to gather them. You accuse the soil for that which is due to your own want of observation. All lands produce nettles and thistles, but these beautiful flowers can and do grow there too; and a country has a right to be judged by the best that it gives, not by the common produce which it shares with every other. And as for these rarities, their seeds may perhaps be sown elsewhere and enrich other lands; but even should they refuse, like some orchidia, to grow away from their native soil, I shall not regret my pains if they have proved to you that Providence brings out beauty in rich and strange forms—forms so rich and strange that though their novelty may at

first call forth more surprise than admiration, on examination this feeling will be raised into wonder and delight at the various and unsearchable ways by which the world may be improved."

To those who may wish to know some very interesting particulars on the state of the women among the working-classes in France, I recommend a book called 'L'Ouvrière,' by M. Jules Simon. It contains a wonderful amount of accurate information, and ought to be translated into every language, in order to excite other countries to study the same questions. As the first book of its kind, it is one more proof of the superior interest women inspire in France. In England it would have been written by a woman.

THE END.

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